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Chad: Lack of Security in the East Displaces Chadians and Threatens Darfur Refugees

With rebels moving towards N'Djamena, and fears of an impending coup intensifying, the Chadian and refugee population in Chad are increasingly vulnerable and at risk of displacement.

For the past several months, Chadian rebel activity, government counterstrikes, and Janjaweed incursions have been creating a dangerous and insecure environment for the population in eastern Chad and Darfur. Because of the growing number of attacks and ambushes, humanitarian workers are finding it difficult to provide assistance to the 200,000 Darfuri refugees in camps along the Chad/Sudan border, as well as to local populations. The number of Darfurians seeking refuge in camps is increasing; many of the new arrivals are part of the 25,000 Sudanese that have been living in Chadian border villages since 2003. In addition, over 30,000 Chadians have also been forced out of their villages, with some of them fleeing to the interior of Chad, and others crossing the border into Darfur.

Refugee camps are not safe havens either. On April 10, rebels from the United Front for Democratic Change (FUCD) reportedly attacked Goz Amer camp, located in southeastern Chad, near the Darfur border. Despite agreements between Chad and Sudan, fighting continues, and no military presence in Chad --- not the Chadians, nor the French, nor AMIS (the African Union Mission in Sudan) --- is able or willing to assert order. Humanitarian contingency planning is also falling short, and is not keeping up with the evolving security situation in the region.

In March Refugees International was in Goz Amer, where the team spoke with Sudanese refugees that had been living in the border region of Chad for the past two years, but had recently decided to seek shelter at the camp. One of them was in the hospital, with a bandage covering a large head

wound. "I was on foot when three people on horses, Janjaweed, came and attacked me with a machete to my head. It took twenty days for me to get to this hospital; we have only traditional medicine in the bush." His nephew also spoke with RI. "The villages around us were attacked. Many people are still there because they didn't have donkeys, like us, to leave. The Janjaweed make us afraid, and there are no Chadian military. They used to be there, but left last December."

RI also visited the town of Goz Beida, where over 4,000 internally displaced have sought refuge. They told RI similar stories, of continuous attacks by Sudanese Janjaweed and Chadian militia. One woman's husband was killed in an attack; she fled with her five children. "Our village was pillaged, not burned, by Janjaweed. They came to take our food."

The Chadian military, reportedly with only 12-15,000 troops and wracked by constant desertions, has been unable to secure the frontier. It has concentrated its forces in the border town of Adre, where it repulsed an RDL attack in December 2005. One UN official explained the importance of Adre to the Chadian government: "Historically, whoever takes Adre, takes Abeche. Once you take Abeche, you pretty much have N'Djamena."

Forces have also been deployed in a few key towns, such as Ade. But in between these posts, there is a security vacuum where Janjaweed, rebels, and bandits have been able to terrorize the local population with impunity. The refugee

camps also have very little protection; the Chadian governmental body that handles refugee issues, CNAR, has seconded poorly equipped gendarmerie to provide security for the camps. With one gendarme for every 1,000 refugees, they provide little deterrence to any armed incursion. In fact, in the attack of April 10 on Goz Amer camp, the gendarmes were unable to fend off the rebels; three gendarmes were wounded, and one killed.

The French military, which numbers a little more than 1,000, could be doing more to increase security along the border. They claim that their co-operative agreement with the Chadian government does not give them the mandate to take a pro-active role in protection of refugees and Chadians; however, they have admitted that they do provide a certain level of “deterrence of attacks through presence.” Chadians interviewed by RI believed that this was the case as well; French patrols in the area brought about calm and attacks ensued upon their departure.

In dealing with the violence in Darfur, the African Union has been greatly hampered, with little capacity to act in the most difficult border zones. On the Chad side, it has no mandate to control the border or to provide protection in eastern Chad. A small AMIS military observer team is present in Abeche, with an AU liaison office in N’Djamena. Their equipment and capacity for action are limited. The main activity of the AMIS forces in Chad has been to monitor the situation of Darfurians in the camps.

Given the current inability, or unwillingness, of the main actors in the region to halt the deteriorating security situation, humanitarian agencies need to be more realistic about what the Chadian, French, and the African Union militaries can do to assist them. In their contingency planning, UNHCR has referred to the possibility of the AU providing security for refugees. Given the AU’s current mandate and capacities, this is not possible. The plans also emphasize food, water, and medical assistance, when the number one preoccupation of refugees is security. “If it is too dangerous for the humanitarian community at the camps, it is too dangerous for us,” one refugee leader told RI. There is also no plan yet to handle the growing IDP crisis.

The recent upsurge in violence is not simply “Darfur spreading into Chad.” The recent coup attempt against President Deby, governmental strikes against rebel groups, tensions between N’Djamena and Khartoum, attacks on villages committed by both Chadians and Sudanese, and the report that several thousands of Chadians are seeking refuge in Darfur all indicate that the conflict continues to move both ways across the border. This tension will only increase in

the run-up to the May elections and may culminate in an overthrow of the current regime in power. The international community cannot seek solutions for Darfur without considering the crisis in Chad and the need to protect Chadian civilians as much as Darfurians.

REFUGEES INTERNATIONAL RECOMMENDS:

- ❑ The Chadian government explicitly request the French military to assist in securing the borders;
- ❑ The French military increase its patrolling in the border zone, in order to enhance its ability to deter by presence;
- ❑ AU expand the mandate of AMIS to include monitoring of border area, on both the Sudan and Chad side;
- ❑ The donor countries for AMIS provide adequate financial assistance, and NATO support, to assist with increasing AMIS’ ability to work on the Darfur side of the border;
- ❑ The mandate of a future UN mission should focus not only on the border, but also on the security needs of eastern Chad;
- ❑ The UN agencies include in their security contingency planning ways to ensure to the greatest extent possible the safety of vulnerable refugee and internally displaced populations.
- ❑ Humanitarian agencies plan for the growing IDP crisis, and insist on greater numbers of gendarmerie for the camps.

Advocates Kristele Younes and Sally Chin just returned from Chad.