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Chad: Respond to the Needs of 30,000 Internally Displaced Persons

Over the past year, the security situation along the border that Chad shares with Darfur has significantly deteriorated. Since September 2005, Chadian militias and Sudanese Janjaweed have attacked Chadian villages, resulting in the displacement of nearly 30,000 people.

As recently as April 10th, a rebel group, the United Front for Democratic Change (FUCD), allegedly attacked several villages and a refugee camp near Goz Beida, a town near the border in southeastern Chad.

Most of the displaced remain along the border, near their home villages, assisted only by the local impoverished host populations. Those who have made their way into camps or towns further from the border in their quest for safety have found it difficult to locate any assistance from the international humanitarian community. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) does not have the mandate to assist internally displaced persons in Chad. The UN agencies are waiting for the Chadian government to own up to the crisis and formally request assistance. Despite many promises made by the Chadian government to international organizations, the Chadian army has not secured its borders, nor is it protecting its citizens.

In March Refugees International (RI) visited Goz Beida, where several hundred internally displaced had just arrived. Goz Beida is also home to Djabal refugee camp, which hosts more than 14,000 refugees. "We left our village a year ago because we were attacked by Janjaweed," a displaced man told RI. "We fled to Koloye. And then just recently Koloye was attacked. We came here because the Sultan will protect us. We can't go back home. Not until it's safe." In the meantime, he lives with his family and many others under a tree, waiting until they can gather enough hay to build huts.

Only those with means could make it all the way to Goz Beida from Koloye; nevertheless, they arrived with few possessions. The Sultan of Dar Sila, the traditional leader in the region, gave them some land abutting Djabal, as well as some flour and two calves. "The government of Chad does not care about these people and it is not providing them with the security they need," the Sultan told RI. "I can not let them die of hunger. I have to assist them as much as I can".

The arrival of these internally displaced people is straining scarce local resources, which were already being taxed by refugees. Displaced Chadians could increase resentment between the host population and the new arrivals. Local projects assisting host populations are supposed to mitigate these effects. In all of eastern Chad, however, UNHCR hasn't spent even half of its meager 2005 budget line devoted to these kinds of projects. Currently, the internally displaced population, deprived of water, latrines and shelters, is using Djabal's infrastructure, which is extremely weak. Water is a huge concern and, according to one humanitarian worker, there is "a complete lack of functional latrines" in Djabal refugee camp. Humanitarian agencies in Goz Beida fear a public health crisis to which they will not be able to adequately respond.

The UN agencies have not been prepared to intervene in the growing IDP situation. Assistance will be needed for the foreseeable future as the security situation is not improving. As of mid-April, over 4,000 displaced are now in Goz Beida, due to attacks and general insecurity on the border. The April 10 attack

on the Goz Amer refugee camp, not far from Goz Beida, and surrounding villages, will only increase this number of displaced.

A year ago, when the situation seemed less unstable, ICRC, which has been the informal lead agency for internally displaced persons in eastern Chad, organized two food distributions to people in the border villages. Given the continuing raids by Janjaweed at the border, this approach must be carefully reconsidered so as not to make already vulnerable populations more susceptible to attacks. With ongoing insecurity and the upcoming rainy season, the internally displaced are unlikely to return home anytime soon. As the situation evolves, international organizations must assess the acceptability of setting up camps for the internally displaced. A lack of response could lead Chadians to seek refuge in war-torn Darfur, a solution chosen by several thousands over the past few months.

RI understands the concern shared by the Chadian government and the UN agencies that setting up IDP camps might generate more displacement by enticing people away from their homes. However, the current situation is not tenable. The World Food Programme has recently been named lead agency for the UN response to the crisis. While this is an unusual role for WFP, RI feels that WFP, given its operational presence near the border, is well-suited to step in. It must now lead a coordinated response including, when needed, the delivery of food assistance and non-food items, as well as the organization of protection activities. The other UN agencies must not fall prey to the political infighting that often occurs over who will be the lead agency. Instead, as Chad has little resources and is poorly funded by donors, coordination is essential. It is the international community's responsibility to find adequate ways to assist the most vulnerable, and it must begin to plan for a possible protracted displacement crisis in Chad.

REFUGEES INTERNATIONAL RECOMMENDS:

- ❑ The government of Chad deploy its forces along the border to provide increased and adequate security for the Chadian and refugee population living alongside the border with Sudan;
- ❑ The government of Chad acknowledge the existence of an internal displacement crisis and formally request the international humanitarian community to establish and implement adequate solutions to provide protection and assistance to the displaced;

- ❑ Donor governments and international organizations continue their efforts to pressure the government of Chad to protect its citizens and recognize that there is a real internal displacement crisis that needs to be addressed;
- ❑ The UN Country Team continue sending regular inter-agency missions and border monitoring missions to assess the protection and assistance needs of the internally displaced;
- ❑ The World Food Program lead an adequate and coordinated response to the crisis, including, if needed, the establishment of camps, as well as delivery of assistance comprising food, non-food items and shelter, and protection activities; WFP should make timely appeals to donors for food assistance for the internally displaced;
- ❑ The UN Country Team include the response to the needs of the internally displaced in any contingency planning that is currently underway;
- ❑ UNHCR implement projects aimed at providing assistance to local host communities;
- ❑ UNHCR and other UN agencies assure that implementing partners are meeting the Sphere standards in the delivery of assistance and management of refugee camps, and hold accountable partners who fail to do so;
- ❑ Donors increase assistance for the inevitable protracted IDP crisis that is unfolding in Chad.

Advocates Kristele Younes and Sally Chin recently returned from Chad.