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A RACE AGAINST TIME IN EASTERN CHAD

By Omer Ismail and John Prendergast

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For many who follow the crisis in Darfur, Chad is simply the neighboring country where hundreds of thousands have sought refuge from the rampages of armed militia backed by the Sudanese government. But today, Chad is engulfed in its own crisis, one that draws on internal contradictions but is fueled and inflamed by the conflict in Darfur. And it is one that is poised to claim tens of thousands of innocent men, women, and children as its victims.

Time is not on the side of civilians in eastern Chad, whether they are among the 180,000 internally displaced Chadians, the 231,000 Sudanese refugees, or the longstanding residents of villages vulnerable to the swirling winds of violence in the region. Having just returned from a visit to the Chad/Sudan border, ENOUGH strongly believes there is a real risk of an escalation of violence and attacks on civilians in the coming weeks.¹ It is thus urgent to speed up the deployment of the European Union protection force and mount a robust diplomatic campaign that addresses the multiple layers of conflict fueling the violence.

The next two months are critical. In late October, the Chadian government signed a peace accord with four rebel groups. However, recent heavy fighting between the Chadian army and other rebel forces in the southeast is a grim indication that Chad's internal crisis is far from over. The EU force is not slated to deploy until December and January, but with the end of the rainy season, numerous armed groups in the region—rebel forces, the Chadian army, and Janjaweed militias—are now able to move more freely. In Chad's wild east, all parties are poised to jockey for position on the ground, killing and displacing thousands more Chadians before the EU force arrives.

The international community can mitigate a surge in violence and civilian suffering if it rapidly mounts

an assertive strategy that focuses on the "3 Ps" of crisis response: peace, protection, and punishment:

- **Peace:** a comprehensive political strategy addressing the internal and external causes of violence in eastern Chad, backed by the diplomatic engagement of the supporters of the warring parties and their proxies
- **Protection:** rapid and early deployment of the EU force, with appropriately robust rules of engagement with a focus on aggressive civilian protection—of refugees, internally displaced persons, and all other vulnerable Chadians
- **Punishment:** clear penalties imposed by the U.N. Security Council, the EU, and the United States against those who initiate and exacerbate violence on the ground. Multilateral accountability measures must be combined with support for local justice through the Chadian judiciary and traditional conflict resolution mechanisms.

Ultimately, neither a security strategy nor a humanitarian response to the crisis in eastern Chad can succeed unless they are undertaken in the context of an overarching political strategy that addresses the major sources of violence destabilizing this troubled region.

LAYERS OF VIOLENCE IN EASTERN CHAD

There are three layers of violence that have led to the displacement of over 180,000 Chadian civilians in little more than a year.²

The first is the proxy war between Chad and Sudan.³ Each government is supporting rebels fighting against the other. The Sudanese government has been and continues to encourage Janjaweed attacks across the border into Chad as part of its

1 John Prendergast and Omer Ismail traveled with the basketball player Tracy McGrady and a documentary film team, looking at the dynamics of violence in the sub-region.

2 For more information on these layers of violence, see, Human Rights Watch, "They Came Here to Kill Us," Volume 19, No. 1(A), January 2007.

3 French political analyst Gerard Prunier calls it the overlapping Darfur/Chad civil wars. Gerard Prunier, "Chad's Tragedy," openDemocracy, September 7, 2007.

strategy to regionalize the Darfur crisis and punish Chadian President Idriss Deby for supporting Darfur's rebel groups. During field interviews with displaced Chadians, ENOUGH heard repeated accounts of attacks by Sudanese militia groups within Chad. As one Dadjo (a non-Arab ethnic group) elder told us, "They want to destroy us in Chad and in Darfur. They want to take our animals and our land, because it is fertile and near to Sudan."⁴ Quite clearly, the crisis emanating from Sudan has dramatically intensified conflict within Chad.

Second, the Chadian government and its rebel opponents are engaged in a seething civil conflict marked by occasional eruptions of intense violence. Politics in Chad have traditionally been a winner-takes-all affair—political elites have politicized ethnicity, and strongmen from various ethnic groups constantly vie for the ability to plunder state resources.

The most dangerous conflict right now is the power struggle between President Deby, a Zaghawa, and Defense Minister Mahamat Nour, a Tama. Nour led a Khartoum-backed rebel group called the United Front for Change, or FUC, and launched a 2006 coup attempt that nearly ousted Deby from power. With help from the French government and Sudanese rebel groups, Chadian forces held their ground in N'Djamena. Nour fell out of favor with Khartoum and, lacking a patron, signed a deal with Deby early in 2007. But each man interprets the details of the agreement differently: While President Deby has tried to weaken the former rebels by disarming and redeploying them in small groups to barracks around the countryside, Nour had anticipated that his forces would be fully integrated into the Chadian army with their weapons and ranks intact. Unwilling to accept Deby's terms, many FUC units have refused to disarm. Nour has accused the Zaghawas—and by extension Deby—of being the aggressors, and tensions are now escalating.

In October, Deby declared a state of emergency in the East and sent tanks and attack helicopters to eastern Chad to forcibly disarm Nour's fighters. Against this backdrop, a 200-strong column of FUC vehicles recently crossed into Sudan, further complicating the security situation in Darfur and creating the possibility of increased cross-border fighting. Once again the victims of unchecked political violence, civilians on both sides of the border are fleeing the growing conflict. In the absence of a negotiated settlement to this thorny dispute, current levels of dangerous and destructive but containable violence could ignite into a full-scale inter-communal conflict.

Also inter-communal, the third layer of violence is stoked by the cooperation between Sudanese Janjaweed and some Chadian Arab militias. Arab attacks on non-Arab communities in eastern Chad have led to widespread displacement and, in some cases, retaliation against local Arab populations. As in Darfur, the traditional structures that might have resolved these and other conflicts have broken down in eastern Chad. In the absence of any mechanism for resolving these disputes before they spin out of control, the growing politicization of ethnicity is stoking a cycle of displacement and revenge attacks. Battle lines are drawn on ethnic lines, and small arms flooding into the region are feeding increased bloodletting.

Chadian Arabs interviewed by ENOUGH say that Sudanese Janjaweed forces are responsible for the violence, but they also admit to hosting the militias and providing them sanctuary because of their kinship ties. Regardless of these traditional connections, Arab communities are also being adversely affected by the fighting. Although displaced Arabs have tended not to seek safe haven in the displaced camps and thus are harder to quantify,⁵ as many as 30,000 Chadian Arabs have fled to Darfur, where the Khartoum government has welcomed them with offers of Sudanese citizenship and land stolen from Darfur's non-Arab communities.

4 ENOUGH interview in IDP camp, September 2007.

5 ENOUGH interviews in Goz Beida and surrounding areas, September 2007.

FOCUSING ON PROTECTION

As emphasized in ENOUGH's August 2007 report on protecting civilians in eastern Chad,⁶ it is crucial that the EU force has robust rules of engagement focused on protecting civilian populations in eastern Chad. The force must be impartial, and, given France's long history in Chad, must diversify beyond French troops, including within its command structure. Neutrality—in both operations and composition—is critical to disproving any fears that French troops are there to support or prop up President Deby, a long-time French ally. This perception could lead to violence against EU forces by rebel groups opposed to Deby's regime.

A nimble and rapid reaction capability that will allow the force to respond quickly and assertively to violence in the region is a critical ingredient for success. EU troops should deploy to, and must be able to patrol, the areas that the IDPs have abandoned in order to help create the secure conditions necessary for the safe and voluntary return of the displaced to their homes. The protection force—whether under EU or eventually U.N. command—should not withdraw until the peace agreements between Deby and Chadian rebels are implemented. Even then, it will be essential to consolidate peace and security by ensuring that infrastructure and other development needs are met and can enable Chad, and the East in particular, to jump-start local economies, foster trade, and provide social services.

TIME FOR A COMPREHENSIVE STRATEGY

In and of itself, the deployment of the EU protection force is not a solution. It must be perceived, deployed, and operated as a tool in a larger political strategy that focuses on each of the three layers of violence that stoke real and potential conflict in Chad.

An overarching political strategy could have a meaningful impact if it includes four key elements.

First, the French—working closely with the United States, China, and Libya—should launch an intensified diplomatic effort to moderate the proxy conflict between the governments of Sudan and Chad. If last month's peace deal between Chad and four rebel groups is implemented and support from Sudan to Chadian rebels is diminished, then pursuits of regional peace have a much greater chance of success. This effort must be closely coordinated with the Darfur peace negotiations in Sirte, Libya.

Second, the U.N. Department for Political Affairs, or DPA, should engage Libya to facilitate a lasting solution to Chad's multi-layered political crisis. The Libyan-brokered agreement between N'Djamena and four Chadian rebel groups is unlikely to stick unless it is seen as the first step in a much longer political process. Since the EU is leading the protection force, the U.N. Secretary-General will not have a Special Representative in Chad (as he does in Sudan, Congo, and other countries with U.N.-led peacekeeping missions). The DPA can fill this void and help provide the follow-up that is necessary to use the agreement as the foundation for addressing several of the obstacles to a durable peace. Because the armed rebel groups, for example, are generally unrepresentative of most Chadians, the DPA should broaden the political dialogue to include other Chadian stakeholders. In August, Deby's government reached an agreement with a group of political parties to establish an independent electoral commission and a timeline for elections. In this instance as well, the DPA can help provide the necessary follow through to ensure that the Chadian government and the political parties continue talking and adhere to their commitments.

Third, an effective political strategy must include the sustained, high-level presence of the U.N. Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in the East. The office should examine the internal conflicts that generate human rights abuses as well as the cross-border attacks which fuel violence in

⁶ Mia Farrow, Omer Ismail, and John Prendergast, "How to Protect Civilians in Eastern Chad," ENOUGH Strategy Paper #5 (Washington, D.C.: ENOUGH Project, August 2007).

eastern Chad. Regular human rights reporting will arm diplomats with precise information on who is responsible for what atrocities, critical knowledge for sorting out truth from fiction at the negotiating table and for pursuing accountability.

Fourth, a comprehensive political strategy must include a focus on and meaningful investments in local conflict resolution. For example, this should be a central non-military component of the EU force's mandate and operations. Conflict resolution forums to address inter-communal violence will be essential. If not addressed, the inter-communal dimension of the conflict, fuelled by other factors, could be the Achilles heel of the EU mission. One has only to observe what happened with the U.N. missions in eastern Congo and Darfur to see the disastrous consequences when protection missions are weakened, and sometimes endangered, and when local dynamics are overlooked or ignored.

The inclusion of political officers in the EU mission, perhaps provided by the United Nations, would allow for the resuscitation of the traditional mechanisms for resolving inter-communal conflict, in cooperation with the Chadian government. Experienced political officers could facilitate inter-ethnic dialogue on local problems and also, and importantly, inform national political deliberations.

Other steps should also be taken in support of inter-communal reconciliation. Both humanitarian and development initiatives can be designed to promote inter-group cooperation through the rehabilitation of markets; support for agricultural production and trade; assistance to pastoralist communities; ensuring increased access to water resources; and the opening of schools and health clinics—all in ways that help to bring communities together for mutual benefit and survival. Support for the rule of law, through state institutions of justice and in coordination with support for tradi-

tional reconciliation processes and actors, is also a critical element. As many displaced Chadians told us, and one elder summarized, "If we go back to our homes and there is no rule of law, we will take our revenge eventually. But if the rule of law is established, we can co-exist."⁷

Absent a comprehensive political strategy aimed at all three layers of violence in Chad, crisis and conflict will spiral. Solutions will grow more elusive, violence will increase and spread, and the costs to local citizens, the displaced, and refugees will grow. The longer that the international community leaves these three layers of conflict to fester, the greater the risk that Chad will fragment and spiral into violence, as Darfur has done.

ENDING IMPUNITY

As we heard from one displaced Chadian after another, both criminals and those who have perpetrated human rights abuses must be brought to justice in order for people to return home with some measure of security.⁸ This includes the Chadian army, which bears responsibility for human rights abuses including, for example, the widespread use of child soldiers, and which has both acted with impunity and failed to act on its responsibility to protect citizens from the various sources of violence.

Breaking the cycle of impunity is neither a lofty goal nor a step to be taken later, after peace has been achieved. The fact that civilians are protected neither by the Chadian state nor by the international community reveals that there is a dangerous vacuum in Chad. Civilians have neither physical safety nor the safeguards afforded by the rule of law and civil institutions. That vacuum is being filled by militia and groups armed in their own self defense. With small arms readily available, this means that violence, and the force of arms, is the defining feature of interaction between communi-

7 ENOUGH interviews in IDP camps in eastern Chad, September 2007.

8 "Justice must precede reconciliation," one displaced elder told us during ENOUGH's visit to the camps in September 2007.

ties—and it is an interaction that is growing more violent by the day.⁹

As a first step, the U.N. Security Council should authorize targeted sanctions against those with command responsibility for war crimes and crimes against humanity and those who continue to stoke conflict. The Security Council should also consider referring the crisis in Chad to the International Criminal Court. Finally, planning should be initiated now for the assistance and training that will be needed to help establish the rule of law in these areas once a settlement has been achieved and security restored.

The “3 Ps”

As in Darfur, the elements required for a solution to the growing crisis in eastern Chad are the “3 Ps” of crisis response: a comprehensive **peace** strategy must address the three layers of violence afflicting the region; the EU force must prioritize the **protec-**

tion of vulnerable populations in the East; and the appropriate local and international accountability mechanisms must be used to **punish** the perpetrators of escalating violence over the past few years.

In order to restore productivity in their home areas, avoid another year of dependence, and prevent further economic decline, displaced civilians from Chad must return to their communities by March to prepare fields for planting. That means that the international community has only a small window of opportunity for action. But the much more immediate race with time involves the speed with which the EU can deploy its forces to eastern Chad. As the rains end, all signs point to a surge of violence from across the border and throughout the East, particularly the Southeast. If major diplomatic efforts are not undertaken, forces are not deployed quickly, and accountability measures are put in place by the U.N. Security Council to deter those who would foment violence, then this could be the bloodiest season Chad has seen in a very long time.

⁹ For more detail, see Human Rights Watch, “They Came Here to Kill Us.”



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ENOUGH is a project founded by the International Crisis Group and the Center for American Progress to end genocide and crimes against humanity. With an initial focus on the crises in Darfur, eastern Congo, and northern Uganda, ENOUGH's strategy papers and briefings provide sharp field analysis and targeted policy recommendations based on a "3P" crisis response strategy: promoting durable peace, providing civilian protection, and punishing perpetrators of atrocities. ENOUGH works with concerned citizens, advocates, and policy makers to prevent, mitigate, and resolve these crises. To learn more about ENOUGH and what you can do to help, go to www.enoughproject.org.



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1333 H Street, NW, 10th Floor
Washington, DC 20005
Phone: 202-682-1611 Fax: 202-682-1867
www.enoughproject.org