



INTERNATIONAL RESCUE COMMITTEE

IRC Briefing from the Field: How the IRC is Handling the Situation in Darfur

**Moderator: Janet Harris
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IRC vice president of Development Janet Harris:

The IRC has been operating in Sudan for 20-plus years and we're going to engage you in a conversation with three very interesting people today... The first 30 minutes, we are going to be talking to our guests, and in the last 20 minutes or so there will be a time for your questions... So without further ado, I'm going to introduce you to our three guests.

First of all, Joseph Aguetant, who is our country director in Chad, he's calling in from N'Djamena, Chad, and so he is truly calling in from the field to talk to all of you today. Joseph originally worked with the IRC on our emergency response team going to Chad three years ago and then spent some time in Sudan as our senior protection coordinator. Joseph has now been our country director for some time in Chad and has some very interesting information to tell you about his experiences there that I think you'll find very provocative.

Now, I just have to warn you that there are some technical challenges of bringing Joseph into the call. We are doing our best to make sure that you can all hear him clearly and consistently, but if we

experience those technical difficulties, well, welcome to the world of the IRC. We connect you to some of the most remote spots in the world, and if Joseph cuts out for a certain period of time, we'll just bring him back in as quickly as we can.

But here in New York, I can tell you reliably that Gerald Martone, our director of humanitarian affairs, is with us. Gerry's responsibility is to speak and advocate with policymakers at the United Nations in Washington and among our supporters. Prior to his role as director of humanitarian affairs, Gerry was the director of our emergency response team. He's recently returned himself from Darfur, and again has a lot of very interesting and up-to-date information to tell you about the situation in Darfur.

Facilitating our conversation will be Sarah O'Hagan. Sarah is a member of our board. She's a former reporter and a public affairs professional. She worked with CNN and as a PR consultant in Tokyo, and she's traveled frequently to the field with the International Rescue Committee most recently to Sudan in both 2000 and 2004.

So you are going to have a very interesting conversation with these three people today and I want to welcome them and welcome all of you.

And Sarah, I turn it over to you.

Sarah O'Hagan: Thanks, Janet. Thank you all for calling in today and participating in this conversation.

I hope that we're going to be able to provide you both with real time updates from the field on the political and humanitarian situation in Darfur and in Chad, as well as, and just as importantly, with a better understanding on how the IRC actually functions under such difficult circumstances; circumstances that are deteriorating sharply for civilians and the aid agencies there to assist them. The crisis in Darfur is now entering its fourth year and Darfur itself has become almost a household word. I want to take you back for a moment to February 2004.

I was in Khartoum with the IRC in a meeting with the British Ambassador to Sudan. He had just returned from flying over the Darfur region. The first time that he had been granted permission by the government to do so. He told us about the burnt-out and the burning villages that he'd seen from overhead and he reminded us that even though he had actually finally witnessed these things it did not mean that they had not been happening already for six months at that time.

We've come a long way since even 2004 and Darfur has become known as one of the world's worst humanitarian crises. More than 2.4 million people, that's nearly two and a half million (souls), have fled their homes in Sudan and crowded into extremely overcrowded refugee camps or have crossed over the eastern border to the neighboring country of Sudan, or more recently to the southern neighbor of the Central African Republic. Some 300,000 people are thought to have died.

It began in 2003 when the rebels, primarily from Darfur and (Segowa) tribes, attacked Sudanese military bases in the Darfur region. At that time, they were seeking greater political representation for Darfur in the context of the larger peace talks going on at the time between north and south Darfur. Their actions triggered a conventional military response from the government of Sudan, but more ominously, the mobilization of the local militias drawn from the (herder) population known as janjaweed, a term that loosely translates into hell on horseback.

The signing of the Darfur peace agreement in May 2006 which stipulated that the government of Sudan should disarm the janjaweed has unfortunately done nothing to really reduce the fighting. Fighting between the rebels, the janjaweed, and the government troops go on. In August of 2006, the UN passed a resolution authorizing a strong UN peacekeeping force for Darfur but attempts to reach an accord with the government of Sudan to implement that resolution have not been successful.

Civilians continue to suffer attacks, atrocities upon women, and abductions. Some people are now fleeing for the second or third time. People are spilling over into Chad; people are spilling over into

Central African Republic. The United Nations' agencies that are working inside Sudan just recently issued a couple of weeks ago a strongly-worded statement and I'd like you just to hear this one phrase from it. They wrote: in the face of growing insecurity and danger to communities and aid workers, the UN and its humanitarian partners have effectively been holding the line for the survival and protection of millions. That line cannot be held much longer. So I want to go first to Joseph in Chad.

Joseph, that statement paints a very grim and urgent picture. What are the spillover effects of the crisis inside Chad at present and what's the IRC doing to address them?

Joseph Aguetant: Well, thanks, Sarah. First of all, I think the main spillover effect of the Darfur crisis into Chad we experienced three years ago almost day by day. When we first started the operation being east of Chad, we were part of an emergency response team. That's the team that is sent all around the world to basically respond to crises (and) they arise, and the support that our donors are providing to the emergency response team is critical to flexibility and rapid response. So we started with assisting a group of - a smaller group of Darfur refugees at the border. This was the first spillover effect, if you wish, of the Darfur crisis into Chad.

This group of refugees quickly grew up to 26,000 to the current number of refugees we're assisting in the northern most part of the border between Chad and Darfur. This is a very isolated location. (They were) far from everything. It's a bit like a town in itself and sitting right at the border. It is the biggest camp that IRC manages at the border there.

Interestingly, the other spillover effect, if you wish, is that the Darfur conflict didn't stop there. It contaminated like an infectious disease the Chadians themselves, the Chadian population. More recently, we've seen the internally displaced persons and the number of internally displaced persons rising from 40,000 last year to 120,000 this year. So it's a - it's a dramatic increase and that's the main consequence of the spillover effects.

And lastly, the main consequence of the - of the Darfur crisis on Chad is basically that we're having difficulties operating in a very, very insecure environment and securities is getting out of hand. It's basically on the brink of a total collapse. We're having difficulties to operate with minimal staff and I can tell you more later about some of the security incidents that we've been facing, which I know at the end of the day affect us, but also affect refugees from Darfur because we are not able to provide assistance as much as we would want to.

Sarah O'Hagan: Joseph, can I just get you to go over the numbers for us of how many refugees are inside Chad and how many internally displaced Chadians?

Joseph Aguetant: The numbers for us (at) IRC, the camp we're managing is 26,000. The total number of refugees across eastern Chad is spread out between 12 camps, so out of these 12 camps we are managing the biggest one. The total number's 120,000 refugees. The total number of - I'm sorry - ((inaudible)) refugees. The total number of displaced persons is 120,000, so that is Chadians who were uprooted by the Darfur conflict but have not crossed any international border ((inaudible)) in Chad.

Sarah O'Hagan: And in the international arena is there any discussion about any kind of protection inside Chad the way the African union continues although its mandate expired in September in this period of transition to provide some protection for civilians?

Joseph Aguetant: Yes, there's been many discussions, and we in the international, you know, the humanitarian side of things we sometimes find it quite frustrating that there's more discussion than action.

We've seen ((inaudible)) resolutions that authorized the United Nations to propose what they call their multidimensional presence, which is a complicated term. Basically said that they would like to have a force - an international force that would be deployed inside Chad to stabilize the border and hopefully also to provide some protection to refugee camps.

The International Rescue Committee not only providing assistance in the form of water, in the form of health, education in the camp, we also are very (active) in terms of doing advocacy, you know, trying to push so that the UN, and other (actors), various states can contribute troops to very, very important international mission to secure eastern Chad.

We think that this is a precondition for us to be able to operate and to help protect the refugee camps. We've been calling for a 24-hour-a-day and seven-day-a-week presence in the camps so that the refugees who came to seek safety and asylum and frankly didn't find safety - neither safety nor asylum would then be a bit more secure in those camps.

Sarah O'Hagan: And ...

Joseph Aguetant: And it also calls for the international mission to monitor and investigate reports all of the security incidents that we are suffering from - us and also the refugees.

Sarah O'Hagan: ... and on that score, Gerry, of what refugees have or have not found when they have arrived at a supposedly safe haven, would you describe the conditions that refugees are facing in terms of health, safety, protection of women and children in general in Darfur and Chad?

Gerald Martone: Right. To add, Sarah, to what Joseph has described, you have to imagine that the Chad/Darfur frontier, the region we're talking about, is one of the most remote, landlocked places on earth. It is the geographic center of the Sahara Desert so it's a very stark, harsh, arid place. In order for us to provide relief work there, it is the single, most expensive relief operation anywhere in the world per refugee that's assisted.

They need every - most to the camps are in places that are inhospitable for humans. They're places not designed for people to live. Many of them are along the banks of rivers, out in large open areas of sand. There is no protective shelter, very little vegetation, if any, so people need the most basics

not only in the form of shelter from the sun, protection from some very cold nights in the desert, basic water and sanitation services, the most rudimentary in terms of food assistance, medical care, and management of camp services. We're in a position, particularly in Chad but also in the numerous camps in Darfur where we work, where we are providing all the essentials for simple survival of refugees in this really harsh place.

Sarah O'Hagan: Joseph, will you describe a little bit to us the conditions of a refugee camp in Chad?

We may have temporarily lost Joseph so I'm going to ask (Gerry) to tell us something about what the IRC has been doing in partnership with the UN or other organizations to address the situation in Darfur.

Gerald Martone: Yes. One of the most important things, as I mentioned, we're in a position of providing for a lot of the sustenance of refugees. We - for the camps where IRC is stationed we're giving state-of-the-art healthcare. We have combination-based therapies for malaria; we have ((inaudible)) (think) therapies for diarrhea. The kinds of treatments we're providing you'd find even here in some of the best hospitals in the United States.

We're also ensuring - one of the most vital things we're doing is ensuring that people have potable water, safe-drinking water, which is very important, particularly since the age group of the refugees is quite young. The majority of refugees in the world particularly, and this is an even more (skewed) in Darfur, they're a very young population. The children are much more susceptible to the effects of contaminated water, and so providing potable, safe-drinking water is a primary focus for IRC.

You would just be surprised at the kind of program that we're doing in Chad where we're actually taking water - some of the water is as old as three years old in some of the places in the desert area there - sedimenting and flocculating that water, purifying it chlorinating it, and distributing it widely throughout this enormous camp where we're working. This is one of the very important things.

And finally, it's worth - as I mentioned, we're looking at a very young population. We talk about refugees and displaced people, we're talking about camps filled with children and their days are quite monotonous. The camp life is very bleak and dreary, there is very little routine, there's very little normality to camp life. For children, this is - this is very toxic. They need stimulation, they need routines, they need (vast) things that keep them busy and places to go.

IRC has throughout both Darfur and Chad over 80 different child-friendly spaces and this is a term we use for these nonformal education places that we cordon off in the camps, and we use youth and other refugee teachers from among the camp population to run very simple recreation and educational programs, giving basic literacy and innumeracy, sports activities, artistic activities. These are extremely well received by a lot of the people in the camps, particularly to parents, who are pleased to see that there's some structure to the day for their children.

And having just returned from Darfur, I will tell you these programs are very well attended and very well supported by camp leaders.

Sarah O'Hagan: Gerry, can I - can you tell us something also about the security conditions inside the camps, both for people living there as well as for the aid workers? You know, two different sort of pieces of a question, what does it take to get through the day from the perspective of the relief worker?

Gerald Martone: Right now in Darfur is sadly perhaps the climax of a deteriorating situation in terms of security. Darfur has always been somewhat of a - of a lawless environment, but right now between the government forces that are fighting in these brutal janjaweed militias in the rebel groups there are also many bandits and other opportunists that hide out along main convoy routes where aid is delivered. There's been a lot of carjackings; on the average of one carjacking per day where relief vehicles have been stolen or commandeered by men with guns, so we face a significant security threat. Some days worst than others.

It involves - for us, Sarah, it's a lot of coordination and contact among the various aid groups in coordination with the United Nations to keep up-to-date routing maps of where our no-go areas - where we can go and operate today, where we can pass by convoys, and also a lot of extra work in terms of coordinating our travel so that we travel in large groups and are less susceptible to the banditry and carjacking that we've been seeing.

Sarah O'Hagan: You know, technology and communications' technology, which is currently posing us a slight problem maintaining contact with Joseph in Chad, is of the utmost importance to the workers on the field level.

Gerald Martone: Right and for their own security. I mean, everyone has redundant forms of communications. They have handheld radios, everyone has satellite phones, they have cellular phones in areas that have cellular coverage so there has to be a lot of ways for our staff to stay in contact with each other.

It would be important also, Sarah, to mention that our national (staff), the bulk of our work, the bulk of our employees are refugees themselves (or) the beneficiaries. As much as we can, we give them the communication assets that they need to stay in touch with each other and to stay in touch with IRC. But this is a real challenge for them. Being associated with foreign agencies at times presents them with challenges within their own community, and I have to say if there's anyone who works with them, we are very dependent on our national staff and our refugee staff of carrying out our programs and to us, foreigners who come there for shorts amounts of times, we see them very much as our heroes in the aid program.

Sarah O'Hagan: Well, from traveling to the field with the IRC, I wholeheartedly second that statement.

As a humanitarian relief organization, the IRC is justifiably cautious about advocacy on Darfur so as not to jeopardize the safety of that (self-same) field staff you're speaking about and so it's not to jeopardize our ability to remain serving refugees in Darfur, how does the IRC kind of balance that life-saving aid on one side of the scales and promoting advocacy to effect change on a global scale?

Gerald Martone: Yes, what we always have felt that a lot of the aid work is attempting to stop the dying, to arrest unacceptable mortality rates, people suffering from the infectious diseases that happen in such an austere and crowded environment as a refugee camp, but we also realize that there has to be some sustainable end in sight to the conflict in the first place.

We need to not only stop the dying but we need to stop the killing, so IRC puts a lot of effort in advocacy in lobbying the United Nations and lobbying the US government and lobbying other governments to do the right thing, to make our (four) priority, to invest in peacekeeping forces, to support political dialogue that'll bring an end to the conflict there. This is a very important part of the work that IRC does. As such a large relief agency in this context and the fact that we're one of the largest in Darfur, it gives us a very credible and legitimate voice among policymakers. We have - we have opened doors to some very high offices and have been able to give a lot of pressure to get our elected officials to do the right thing.

Sarah O'Hagan: Joseph, you're back.

Maybe Joseph isn't back.

Then, hoping that Joseph is going to chime in on this, I want to ask (Gerry) and Joseph, who I think we'll have back shortly, how do you maintain under these - under these security conditions, under these - in this remote location, how do you maintain your own kind of personal hopefulness in a region where you see so much displacement, so many people living through violent conflict, and ((inaudible)) IRC has been working in Sudan for over 20 years?

Gerald Martone: Yes, part of I think the gratification, particularly for our field staff, is that knowing that they're having an effect. IRC prides itself on the fact that we practice some of the best aid work in our industry and certainly to watch these programs to see how effective they are it's quite heartening and I think it's a real morale boost for our staff.

We also know that for a lot of the children in Darfur that get to participate in these child-friendly spaces I mentioned to you, many of the them had not previously had the opportunity in this poor, poor area of Sudan to go to school, so for them this is actually their first chance at literacy and that's been an exciting thing to see.

Lastly, tragically, Darfur has always been marginalized by the central government in Sudan and this is part of its political evolution as it tries to emerge from a forgotten region - remote, neglected region of Sudan into the limelight. We hope that progress will happen in terms of their political participation and they're brought into a successfully functioning state where Darfur's no longer a neglected and poor area but a vital part of the country.

Sarah O'Hagan: Joseph, are you back with us?

Joseph Aguetant: Yes I am.

Sarah O'Hagan: Oh, bravo.

Joseph Aguetant: ((inaudible))

Sarah O'Hagan: I'm going to ask you then, if you would sort of, you know, paint us a picture: what do the camps look like in Chad, what are the security conditions that civilians are facing there. Just - you know, just take us there a little.

Joseph Aguetant: Well, as (Gerry) described very accurately, it's desert, there's ((inaudible)) and nothing there.

When you go up there, you basically have to drive across sand dunes before you get to the camp. There's always a lot of wind, so if you're lucky on a bright day, you can see the sand dunes from afar but there's usually a lot of wind and the visibility is low.

At this time of year, refugees are very, very cold. The temperature can - are just barely above zero degrees Celsius and refugees are staying there. The old tents there were given to them about three years ago so they're not in impeccable conditions, as you can imagine. So what the refugees have done is build mud bricks. You can see them during the day baking bricks. They basically have some mud that the ((inaudible)), you know, sand with water and they dry the bricks (under) the sun and then build their walls to protect themselves from the - from the wind.

If I can take you as well to the insecurity that's rampant in eastern Chad, I could give you numerous examples of problems, including a bombing that frequently happened; the most recent one three weeks ago where a ((inaudible)) plane, which is the kind of plane that's being used in Sudan, flew over the camp coming from Sudan and went around five times and dropped bombs very near the camp and also very near the dam, which is holding water for the 27,000 - 26,000 refugees that IRC's assisting. So we were very concerned that had it not been for, you know, the ((inaudible)) plane missing (the dam), you know, the only source of water for the (southern) people, plus all the host community the Chadians (leading) ((inaudible)) (that) disappeared.

IRC's providing water for all the refugees. The lake is big enough and we're providing - to give you an idea, it's 320,000 liters of water every day. It's a lot of water for them, which we are purifying by adding, you know, chemicals and various products and filtering the water. In terms of insecurity apart from bombing and in ((inaudible)) from Sudan and we had to go through a very unfortunate incident last

year whereby a driver of ours, an international rescue committee driver, his name's Mohammed, was shot in broad daylight in the middle of (Bahai), which is a location from where we operate. He was simply getting off out of - out of his car and was shot for the sole purpose of...

We miraculously managed to evacuate him and he was operated in N'djamena, the capitol city for Chad, and he survived, but many others do not survive these kind of attacks and we've seen in the hospital that the ((inaudible)) community manages, we've seen hundreds of casualties. These were combatants - soldiers that had been fighting inside Sudan and were badly wounded and poured across the border to (come) and seek treatments at the hospital that the IRC is running. These are some of the examples.

To give you another one, which I think is breathtaking, we were ((inaudible)) in the camp and we had a very committed and dedicated ((inaudible)) who managed to pick up a child who had stopped breathing. The child was in a near coma and she took the child in the IRC car and drove 40 minutes to the hospital and never stopped doing mouth-to-mouth resuscitation. And unfortunately, the girl died when she arrived at the hospital, and (Silvy), you know, she could have been discouraged, instead of being discouraged and instead of, you know, going back home for a well-deserved rest, well, she went back to the camp. She had heard that they were more problems there.

She arrived to the camp after another 40-minute drive, picked up a two-day infant. This time a boy. The boy was one kilo and this time she managed to arrive on time at the hospital. So on the same day, one girl died and one boy survived and this is life in (Bahai). This is a very, very difficult and isolated location but we do manage to sometimes, you know, save lives and this is what we're there for.

Sarah O'Hagan: Well, that's a very vivid portrait of the (nice edge of) survival that the IRC is working on.

I want to open the lines to callers to ask their questions, and just to remind you that if you're listening on a speakerphone, please, pick up the handset to ask your question. You press star one on your phone and you'll be placed in a queue by the Operator.

Joseph, it would seem that - how does this crisis compare for you in your - in your experience with other humanitarian situations that you've been in?

Joseph Aguetant: I think it's - you know, people have called it the worst ((inaudible)) crisis. You know, I don't really know how it compares. You know, there may be people that, you know, have more difficult conditions elsewhere, but what I've seen in Chad, what I've seen in Darfur, and (Gerry) has explained very vivid to you what he saw as well, these are - these are humanitarian crisis; one of the - one of the most dramatic ones. I think when you compare this crisis with others you can definitely say that it's going from bad to worse. There's absolutely no improvements in the security situation and in the conditions for people, and as I said earlier, they came to Chad for safety.

You know, they were attacked in their villages in Darfur. We are basically hosting three main villages in this camp and all three villages left at once. All of the people from these villages left one day (and) were attacked by these Sudanese planes and left - took a few belongings and took a (donkey) ((inaudible)) and then fled to Chad. And, you know, what they found in Chad is not necessarily what they were hoping for. They were hoping for safety and, you know - you know, three years later, ((inaudible)) the same Sudanese ((inaudible)) plane that comes and drops bombs very, very near the camp, and so I would say that situation is indeed not very private and say it's (green).

Q: Having worked with Oxfam and other relief agencies, I'm somewhat familiar with the situation, but I wonder, how has the Chadian government accepted having these refugees flow across the border in such numbers, and to what extent, secondly - second question - the - where does the political situation stand vis-à-vis UN troops - UN peacekeeping forces with the AU beefing up the AU 7,000 forces?

Gerald Martone: Yes. Thank you. I'll answer the first part and then I'll ask Joseph to talk about the Chadian government in terms of how they've allowed refugees to cross in.

In terms of what's being done now, as you're aware, there's a fledgling, very insufficient African union force in Darfur attempting to monitor a cease-fire. They're not peacekeepers. There's only - there's less than 7,000 of these soldiers. Darfur is roughly the size of the state of California. It's an enormously vast area. That roughly works out mathematically to about one soldier for every 28 square miles. (The equivalent of one soldier for the size of the burrow of Manhattan so it's hardly sufficient for refugees. They feel no confidence that this African union force is going to be able to protect them.

The next step is to expand that into a United Nations' full-fledged, peacekeeping force. This ironically requires the consent and invitation of the government of Sudan, and so that is something that's a steep negotiation between the new Secretary General, Ban Ki-moon, and the government of Sudan. Initial plans and a phased approach has been laid out but there have been many obstacles to the implementation of this United Nations' force that would be in conjunction with the present African union force. So we're discouraged about the slow progress; no one more discouraged than the refugees themselves who feel there's no hope in sight. But - and we also recognize that yet another military force, another arm presence in Darfur is not a solution; that ultimately there has to be a legitimate cease-fire and credible political dialogue among the warring parties. This is a place where we have to put most of our investment to get a political conversation going between the different factions.

Joseph, maybe you can comment on the first part of (Peter's) question, which was Chad allowing the refugees to come in.

Joseph Aguetant: Thanks (Gerry). I'd say that the refugees ((inaudible)) to other crises have been welcomed in Chad. There's been no cases of people been sent back, and so three years ago they were all people to settle inside Chad.

The peculiarity with the camp that the IRC's managing is that it's right at the border and it's right at the border because there was a source of water, this dam and this lake that I described earlier, and also because there was no willingness on the part of the refugees and the (authorities) themselves to move them further inside Chad. ((inaudible)) should have been moved further inside so that they would be - they would be safe.

And so for the last three years, there's been a lot of discussions led by the high commissioner for refugees about moving this camp further inside Chad so that security would be - would be guaranteed. The Chadian authorities have agreed. The problem is that we see lack of willingness and sometimes (for) lack of capacity on the part of the local authorities to see the camp moved.

To give you an idea of the lack of capacity, the current security status, you know, (Gerry) was describing the lack of military inside Darfur, well, in (Bahai) and Chad, the total number of gendarmes, the military personnel that's supposed to protect the camp and protect the town of (Bahai), is 12 and this is about - you know, this is a camp and a place that is very insecure, and with 12 gendarmes, as they call them, we feel that it's not a very good guarantee for safety, not to mention the fact that out of these 12 only four have received - have received weapons. And so we have a group of gendarmes who are not really people that harm us.

Sarah O'Hagan: Thanks, Joseph - (Gerry) and Joseph, and we'll start with you, Joseph.

We've got another question from inside the room: the particular problems facing women and the safety of women and what the IRC is doing to address that.

Joseph Aguetant: (Gerry).

Gerald Martone: Yes, one of the - one - a real focus in IRC's approach has been to look at the specific needs of women and girls in these camps.

IRC runs in Darfur nine women's community centers and these are general women's activity centers in health centers. A lot of the women and girls who come to these centers are also victims of sexual assault. They have been raped in the process of fighting or in the process of attacks from soldiers and militia groups. These centers are places where women can find support among their peers but also activities to get involved in therapeutic activities as well as vocational activities, which is another loss they suffered from fleeing from their homes is not having a means to take care of their family.

Joseph Aguetant: On the Chad side, we observe less difficulties in terms of violence against women simply because they're not being attacked by the so-called (gens). We - however, we know full well that the longer the camp stays and the more entrenched and, you know, the more protracted the situation, then the more problems inside the camp, and certainly women who are in a weak position in the society are the first ones to suffer. And we do see instances of violence against women, and therefore, we are (building) various parts of our program so that all of the health, water, education, and protection the ((inaudible)) can address the needs of women.

For example, we have a protection project that consists of information centers. And so we have information that's flowing from refugees to the (humanitarian) community - basically us - and - that's also supporting at risk and the (level of) refugees, many which are - many of whom are women. We also meet regularly with the camp leaders and - including women, and we do try to, you know, assess and also address issues that women are facing.

Recently we've had an issue where the women that were going out to collect firewood were attacked by local Chadians who wanted to prevent them from collecting firewood. Fortunately it wasn't violence in terms of a sexual violence, as one can see in Darfur. It was violence against them because they were taking the wood that the local Chadians wanted to keep for themselves. But lots of women

were hurt and lots of women, you know, (got some) bruises and we had to deal with the consequences of the health center. And so to address these issues, we've talked with our partners and we've talked with the authorities, and the last step is to talk to the Chadians themselves to ensure that the refugees can in fact pick up the wood, as it is allowed under Chadian rule.

Q: Hello. I'm finding this all very interesting and I wondered if you could explain a little bit more the layers of responsibility between IRC and UNHCR and how decisions get made to manage the campus long-term proposition or a short-term proposition. How do you . . .

Joseph Aguetant: Thank you - thanks for that. It's a very, very interesting question and I can - I can - you have probably worked in the humanitarian field (for) asking such a question.

The layers of responsibilities are clear. The UNHCR, the United Nations High Commission for Refugees, is the agency that's been mandated to provide protection worldwide and in particular, international protection, including in Chad. They are present in (Bahai), where we work, and they have entrusted upon us, the International Rescue Committee, to manage the camp, and therefore, IRC, by virtue of its own mandate and having experience in managing camps, is running the camp as if we were running a small city, which means that we are running the meetings, the leaders, we are addressing their issues, and then we always bring in the UNHCR in these meetings.

In fact, ((inaudible)) they recently were downsized because of insecurity and the security phase going up from security phase three to security phase four for UNHCR that presented them to have more staff in (Bahai). We do include the staff that remain in our regions. We do coordinate very, very well. We have a good relationship and we do manage to solve problems together, such as the problems around the firewood issue that I described earlier.

Q: ... Do you anticipate how to plan (for protect) the situation? I mean, you've talked about moving the camp, for instance. (Could) you organize it differently (if you) moved it?

Joseph Aguetant: I think we would organize it differently, although I would say that the camp itself was designed in a - in a participatory manner.

When the camp was established in July 2004 a few months after IRC established an office, we - you know, we had a lot of consultations with the refugee leaders and the various elements of the groups, and as I said, there are three different villages that all came together to form this camp. And so the camp itself is actually divided in three areas and three zones according to the village of origin in Sudan, so I would say that if we were to move the camp tomorrow, we would probably respect the wishes that they had when they first established it in 2004. I think the secret of camp planning and, you know, organizing this kind of camp relocation exercises is simply consultations, making sure ...

Joseph Aguetant: ... that we understand the needs of the refugees, understand what their views are before we, as international community, make plans. And I think that's a mistake that we have - we have made - not so much IRC, but we have made collectively, I would say ...

Joseph Aguetant: . . . in trying to move - in trying to move the camp against the will of the refugees. The refugees, themselves, until now are not so sure about moving further inside Chad. The area where they are now is an area that is insecure, but it's an area that's very close to Sudan and they feel closer to (home). There are various reasons for staying closer and some of them legitimate ones.

Q: Yes, I was wondering if - what you would say would be your greatest need for aid for your refugees there in Chad or in (border) crisis in the south.

Gerald Martone: Joseph, why don't you take a shot at that one.

Joseph Aguetant: I'd say that the biggest need right now is for the internally displaced. These are Chadians who have suffered from the spillover effect of the Darfur conflict and they have not crossed the border, they're still in their country, but they have suffered these effects and they have had to leave their villages. They were attacked very, very similar to the Darfur experience and they had to flee, and I would say that the attention that's being given to the internally displaced is much less than the attention that's being given to refugees.

If we look simply at that numbers, I mentioned earlier that the number of IDPs that's the internally displaced persons, has risen from 20,000 last year to 120,000, which is half of the refugee population, and yet they're not given nearly half of the needs of the refugee program in eastern Chad.

To give you just one example, and there are many, when we went to visit these uprooted Chadian people, they had left their village. One woman was - she had a heart condition because she'd been - she'd been walking for too long, for about 48 hours, and she also - well, she was (older). What we discovered as well is that there were very disturbing people - you know, deaths that were happening that could have been avoided.

For example, a child that died because simply the conditions of the (sites), and the fact that there was lack of hygiene meant that the Chad child bleeding to death. They had cut their - they had cut the fingernail too short and the child was simply bleeding and then passed away, unfortunately. These are some of the conditions we saw when visiting the internally displaced camps inside Chad.

That is for me the most - the most acute need at present that is linked to the Darfur situation. It is ignored by the international community and very, very simple actions, such as hygiene education - simply by educating these communities that you should not cut their fingernails too short and wait a little bit

before you do that can save lives. And, you know, immediate action can - and very simple action can in fact save lives for internally displaced in Chad.