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## MINURCAT Withdrawal: The Risks to Civilian Protection and Humanitarian Assistance in Eastern Chad

### Summary

- Chad hosts over 249,000 refugees from the Darfur conflict and 168,000 internally displaced persons who were relocated after instability caused by Chadian rebel groups.
- The U.N. Mission in the Central African Republic and Chad has been reduced to 1,900 as of October 15, 2010. It will withdraw completely by December 31, 2010. There are concerns about the capacity of the Chadian security forces to adequately protect the population.
- The government of Chad and the international community must work to ensure the security of the population and humanitarian workers.

### Introduction

Chad hosts over 249,000 refugees from the Darfur region and the ongoing insecurity south of Abéché in eastern Chad has prevented roughly 168,000 internally displaced Chadians from returning home. While rebel incursions and cross-border violence has diminished, civilians in eastern Chad continue to be victims of chronic banditry and indiscriminate violence. Still, in January 2010, promising that it could ensure the safety of civilians within its borders, the government of Chad requested the withdrawal of the U.N.'s 3,300 peacekeepers. This peace brief discusses the challenges and accomplishments of the U.N. Mission in the Central African Republic and Chad (MINURCAT) and the concerns surrounding its impending withdrawal; it concludes with recommendations to ensure continued civilian protection.

Violence in eastern Chad that began in late 2005 as a result of cross-border militia attacks on Chadian civilians and ethnic tensions between local groups and Darfuri refugees prompted the deployment of a European Union Peacekeeping Force (EUFOR) in February 2008. EUFOR mandated the peacekeepers to protect civilians from violence and provide secure conditions for the delivery of humanitarian assistance to refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs). In 2008, the MINURCAT followed EUFOR. MINURCAT was mandated to:

"...Help create the security conditions conducive to a voluntary, secure and sustainable return of refugees and displaced persons, inter alia by contributing to the protection of refugees, displaced persons and civilians in danger, by facilitating the provision of humanitarian assistance in eastern Chad and the north-eastern Central African Republic and by creating favourable conditions for the reconstruction and economic and social development of those areas."<sup>1</sup>

“Because the protection of civilians was at the very heart of the MINURCAT mandate, and insecurity continues to plague eastern Chad, the shift away from physical protection activities . . . will impact the day-to-day safety of refugees, IDPs and all civilians, and hinder the ability of humanitarian actors to deliver crucial aid to the area.”

As of April 2010, MINURCAT had deployed 3,300 soldiers throughout eastern Chad and north-eastern Central African Republic (CAR). Despite the government of Chad's claims that MINURCAT failed to fulfill its mandate,<sup>2</sup> it provided general security to refugees and IDPs through its presence and patrols. MINURCAT civilian staff and U.N. Humanitarian staff were provided with armed escorts and logistical and evacuation support. Indeed, even the humanitarian community, which has often criticized the Mission, is concerned that the departure of U.N. peacekeepers will result in a serious deterioration of the overall security environment in eastern Chad.

## Banditry: The Real Threat to Civilians

The government of Chad argues the security situation has improved as a result of the defeat and relative breakdown of Chadian rebel movements and the recent rapprochement with Sudan.<sup>3</sup> But Chadian rebel attacks, while dangerous and chaotic, have not typically been targeted at civilians.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore the militia attacks that were responsible for the internal displacement of roughly 180,000 Chadians in 2005 and 2006, have largely—if not entirely—abated. In fact, by 2007 the major threat to ordinary civilians and humanitarian staff was—and continues to be—banditry, impunity and a prevailing lack of law and order in eastern Chad.<sup>5</sup> Improved Chad-Sudan relations and the weakening of Chadian rebel groups have not improved overall security conditions for civilians.

Attacks by armed bandits represent a continuing threat. In many cases, bandits have targeted humanitarian aid operations; the U.N. has reported dozens of attacks each month on humanitarian operations, and reported more than 200 in 2009. These attacks include banditry, car jackings, burglaries, abductions, and other assaults on U.N. and humanitarian staff that have led to fatalities in some cases and a reduction of assistance in some areas.<sup>6</sup> Refugees and Chadian IDPs are further harmed, when delivery of humanitarian aid is disrupted by armed attacks.

## MINURCAT's Military Protection and Judicial Reform Efforts

The diffused threat posed by small scale bandit attacks spread over eastern Chad's wide expanse presented challenges to MINURCAT and EUFOR.<sup>7</sup> Adapting to these conditions, MINURCAT military personnel (and EUFOR before them) mobilized day and night patrols to demonstrate their presence, and to deter both large and small scale attacks. The U.N. Mission also provides military escorts to humanitarian and civilian convoys, and, in the case of armed attacks, has established a heavy presence in population centers and cordons around refugee and IDP sites to repel attackers and stabilize the situation. Refugees and IDPs, as well as Chadian local authorities credit MINURCAT for improvements in security to humanitarian actors on the ground; they are concerned that MINURCAT's departure will herald a return to former levels of insecurity.<sup>8</sup>

In addition to the military response, MINURCAT partnered with the government of Chad in 2009 to create the *Détachement Intégré de Sécurité* (DIS), a specialized Chadian police to institute community policing programs within and around the refugee camps. Its officers were drawn from the ranks of the existing Chadian police and gendarmerie. In cooperation with other U.N. agencies, funds and programs, MINURCAT civilian police officers provided the DIS with additional training, mentoring and support. Unlike the U.N. peacekeepers, DIS officers have the authority to arrest perpetrators of violence and conduct investigations.

When the DIS initially deployed, some of its officers were involved in serious incidents of misconduct. These included the murder of a civilian in Farchana in March 2009, the gross misuse of firearms,<sup>9</sup> the striking of a refugee in Oure Cassoni, and the misuse and destruction of U.N. issued 4-by-4 vehicles.<sup>10</sup> However, through intensive mentoring, ongoing on-the-job training, and

persistent monitoring, the DIS has improved significantly and has become a critical part of the civilian protection effort.<sup>11</sup>

In addition to physical protection efforts, MINURCAT worked to rebuild the weak, dysfunctional justice system in eastern Chad, through its Judicial Advisory Unit (JAU). Since 2008, the JAU has supported DIS training on proper investigation techniques and reporting procedures, and on the appropriate relationship between the police, the judiciary, and other security actors. The JAU has also contributed to the training of judges as well as the rebuilding and refurbishment of court-houses, and has supported the first successful round of trials held by a mobile court designed to access remote areas of the east.

## Impact of MINURCAT's Withdrawal

While MINURCAT has not been perfect, the reach and impact of U.N. peacekeepers' presence and the relative skill and discipline of DIS officers have markedly improved. A recent Amnesty International report observed: "attacks on humanitarian workers and civilians, which reached alarming levels in the last months of 2009, have begun to decrease as MINURCAT soldiers have been able to carry out patrols in sensitive areas they were previously unable to patrol."<sup>13</sup> Even under the best-case scenario, described in the April 29 Report of the Secretary General,<sup>14</sup> it is questionable if Chadian forces can "...provide the necessary security and protection for vulnerable groups and humanitarian workers."<sup>15</sup>

On May 25, the U.N. Security Council issued Resolution 1923, which called for a reduction of MINURCAT's military forces from 3,300 to 1,900 (including 500 support staff) by October 15, 2010 and complete withdrawal by December 31, 2010. Civilian staff—including those responsible for supporting judicial reforms—will likely remain in place until May 2011. Since May 27, 2010, MINURCAT has not had the mandate to protect civilians under imminent threat of violence<sup>16</sup>—though it will continue to provide security and escorts for U.N. civilian staff until they are fully withdrawn. Because the protection of civilians was at the very heart of the MINURCAT mandate, and insecurity continues to plague eastern Chad, the shift away from physical protection activities—including deterrent activities such as patrols—will impact the day-to-day safety of refugees, IDPs and all civilians, and hinder the ability of humanitarian actors to deliver crucial aid to the area.

MINURCAT's departure will also deprive the JAU and other U.N. humanitarian agencies of critical military escorts they depend on to deliver or monitor their programs, particularly in remote, volatile areas of the country. Moreover, the DIS, which has improved in discipline and effectiveness, will lose all supervision and mentoring once the U.N. civilian staff withdraws. They will also lose the critical technical and logistical support of the U.N. Mission, and it is doubtful whether the DIS will have the capacity or the discipline to carry on with their crucial refugee and humanitarian protection tasks. Worryingly, the Chadian security forces have not demonstrated the ability or the willingness to fulfill MINURCAT's role. Indeed, in the past, members of the Chadian military forces, as well as police and gendarmerie, have been implicated in bandit attacks, car jackings, the violent attack of humanitarian staff,<sup>17</sup> and—on occasion—raids on humanitarian compounds.<sup>18</sup>

## Next Steps to Ensure Civilian Protection

In light of MINURCAT's impending withdrawal, it is imperative to ensure that the government of Chad implements the protection promises that it has made. First, the government of Chad, in partnership with the U.N. and international donors must elaborate a comprehensive and proactive security strategy addressing the particular protection needs of refugees, IDPs, humanitarian actors, and local communities. The plan must account for cross-border and rebel related violence, and

## ABOUT THIS BRIEF

This peace brief describes the security challenges facing eastern Chad and the pending withdrawal of the United Nations Mission in the Central African Republic and Chad. Erin Weir is a Senior Advocate for Peacekeeping at Refugees International. This Peace Brief is part of a series on Chad, originally presented at a conference organized by USIP and the International Peace Institute on May 20, 2010. USIP Senior Research Associate Dorina Bekoe wrote the first Peace Brief of this series, "Stabilizing Chad: Security, Governance and Development Challenges."



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the region's widespread banditry. The strategy should also further the consolidation and enhancements of the gains made in judicial reform. Secondly, the government of Chad must ensure that humanitarian actors are not forced to pay fees to individual police, gendarmerie, or military commanders responsible for their security. Chadian authorities must quickly and decisively discipline any security personnel who demand payment (financial or material) from humanitarian actors in return for their protection. Finally, to credibly demonstrate that its forces can adequately protect civilians, the government of Chad needs to make a clear, concerted effort to eliminate impunity and improve the overall command and control of its security forces.

## Endnotes

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