

United States Institute of Peace  
Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training  
Sudan Experience Project

**Interview # 85 –Executive Summary**

*Interviewed by: Dan Whitman*  
*Initial Interview Date: June 6, 2007*  
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The interviewee was deputy at a multilateral agency working on refugee issues in Africa and elsewhere. In that capacity, she followed the CPA process indirectly, and visited Southern Sudan and Darfur in 2005 and 2006. She made several trips through Khartoum and believed the Khartoum government held back in providing free access to areas in the country with refugee camps.

The informant believed that IDPs (internally displaced persons) were not adequately accounted for under international conventions and efforts made on behalf of refugees. IDPs appeared in 2005-06 to be bearing the brunt of the most difficult circumstances, while Sudanese refugees in neighboring countries had relatively better living conditions. The IDP camps provided by the Khartoum government were poorly equipped, inaccessible, and plagued with security infringements that left many of the IDPs in a state of fear and panic. The Khartoum government displaced the IDPs from one area to another, with little or no regard for their wish to return eventually to their original villages, and with little attention given to sustainable infrastructure.

The various relief organizations seemed to lack cohesive coordination. Funds and efforts spent by multilateral organizations, as well, lacked adequate planning, and went excessively into overhead funds and structures, with the IDPs not really receiving direct benefits from their activities. Bureaucratic turf struggles among the various organizations impeded the overall effort, with little to show, in the end, for the investment in time and money.

The interviewee was an eyewitness to harassment by Sudanese government military, and in one case was the victim of a carjacking by uniformed military, while visiting an IDP camp on her official capacity. She was also physically threatened by Janjaweed militia, though never actually confronted. Through the complex layers of official and unofficial military, while lacking direct chain of command, the result was one of discouraging Western observers from observing conditions on the ground.

The CPA process was helpful in providing a framework for the work done in the troubled areas, but has not yet successfully devised a viable system for relocating and protecting IDPs.

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*Q: I'd like to begin by asking Ambassador Chamberlain her experience when she was in Sudan. And in what capacity were you there?*

A: I was, from January 2004 until January 2007, I was the Deputy High Commissioner for the United Nations High Commission for Refugees. And it was in that capacity that I traveled to Sudan. In fact, when I went to South Sudan, I was the acting High Commissioner. And I went there to visit our operations, UNHCR operations in South Sudan and in Darfur. I also went there in February of 2005.

*Q: There being Darfur?*

A: There being South Sudan.

*Q: South Sudan. Were you still employed with the U.S. government at that time or were you directly with UNHCR?*

A: No. I had retired from the U.S. government. I was a UN employee.

*Q: So you visited, at various times during these three years. What was the length of your stay?*

A: I visited, I made two trips to Sudan. The first one was in February 2005, and then I went again about a year later. But on the second trip I went to just Khartoum and Darfur. I only went to South Sudan once, to Khartoum twice.

*Q: We're eager to hear any aspect about this experience that you want to tell us about, and our particular focus is the CPA. So please feel free to branch off to things that you saw and observed in Darfur and Southern Sudan as they come to mind. But let me start by asking your impression of the CPA negotiation process. We're looking at the role of the various participants, the IGAD, The Kenyans, The Europeans, and of course the United States. To the extent that you were able to observe the process.*

A: No, I can't. I was not a part of that and I didn't really track that and it didn't really impact what I was doing. Let me just describe what I was doing.

*Q: It's all of interest.*

A: When I arrived ahead of my delegation in about February 2005, we flew into Khartoum. We met with various officials, the refugee agency, we met with the Foreign Minister, we met with the Ministry of the Interior. And we pretty much got the standard line. We met with Jan Pronk and the humanitarian coordinator, D'Silva. We had met with different ambassadors, it was pretty full schedule.

I had asked to visit the IDP camps outside of Khartoum. And at this point I think I was only the second highest ranking official to ever go to those IDP camps, the first being Jan Pronk himself. So it was quite a production. And the humanitarian coordinators, people the company gave me. As we were heading out toward the camps which were located outside of Khartoum, we noticed that the government had sent a couple of jeep-loads of guys with machine guns.

We stopped and pulled over, and the UN security officers got out and told them to leave, that we did not want to be accompanied into the camps by the military, Sudanese military, with machine guns. Because that would defeat the purpose of our trip. We were going there to talk to the displaced people about their conditions, and what their needs were, and their expectations for returning home. Because as a result of the CPA we expected that a good number of these displaced people would return home. And we needed to get in our program, UNHCR, an idea of what their needs would be and where they were going, did they want to go, how they would get there and so on. We wanted the straight story. So the guys and the guns left. I recall turning to one of the security officers and saying "Now we'll have trouble."

So we got to the first camp and we got out and walked around and talked to the refugees. Then we went to the second camp. And I just have to tell you, it was really very grim. I honestly haven't been in such conditions before. These IDP camps, these are not refugees – because they are in their own country. They are simply displaced from the South, most of them from the South. So they are refugees within their own country. But their living conditions were very poor.

Most of them had been living there over the last couple of decades as day workers in the city. But there was very little for them there, it was very rough. And then we would see vast tracts, huge areas, 3 or 4 city blocks, of just rubble – where a few months prior to that the government had gone in with bulldozers and just loaded people up on trucks, bulldozed their mud houses and taken the people across the mountains. You could see in the distance, the horizon, the mountains. And on the other side they had just dumped them. Hundreds and hundreds of people. And they left them with only one well. Some of the people made their way back and some of them were stuck there. It was just a deplorable situation. The government's policy, clearly, was to disperse the people of these camps and to create a situation where the people would go home, go back to the South. So we saw this great plains of rubble.

But we entered the second camp and walked around and talked to the people. They were

telling us the story, of course. And then we heard a commotion. We ran out and some government thugs had stolen my car, my UN car. They had jumped in and driven off. I guess the driver left the keys in it. So the other UN cars drove off after them and there was this big drama. One of the government thugs had beaten up my driver and stolen his watch. But they recovered the car. Anyway, they were sending a message to the UN – not to interfere. Now, I tell this story because this is what happened to me, but it was certainly very consistent with what happened to Andrew Natsios when he had gone out. They had actually beaten his translator. And some of the rough treatment that they had actually given the party of Condoleeza Rice when she visited. So this is very typical of the Sudanese government.

*Q: You mentioned when you first arrived and went to the Foreign Ministry, you got the “party line.” What claims were they making about the things they were doing? And what was their stated goal in repositioning the IDPs?*

A: They were urging us to assist the return of the people. They clearly wanted to empty the IDP camps that were outside. So that the displaced persons would go back to the South. But they didn’t want to pay for it – they wanted us to pay for it.

It’s a little complicated because at that time there was no UN agency that owned the issue of IDPs. Our mandate at the UN was clearly for refugees, but those who crossed an international border. My purpose - I had a very short window when I was the head of the agency - my purpose was to get our agency involved in IDP work. I felt that we were better equipped for it than any other UN agency. And that was actually why I went and why I asked to see the IDP camps, and later I used it. And eventually months later we did get the nod from Kofi Annan and the UN inner agency to take the lead on IDPs.

*Q: So your mission was successful in getting UNHCR involved in IDPs in Sudan?*

A: Well I can’t give myself credit or my mission credit. It was a long process, but was all part of leading up to a success in getting UNHCR’s mandate expanded.

*Q: So the experience you’re describing, if I’ve got it right, was just prior to the completion of the CPA.*

A: Yes. Right on the eve of it. In fact we had almost expected it to have happened, but it got delayed a few days.

*Q: Would you say that actually signing the CPA made any difference at all in the type of work that you were doing? Did it improve the situation at all?*

A: Well, yes, it did. Let me back up. The next day I flew down to the place where – you’re going to have to help me with the name –

*Q: In the southern part of the South?*

A: Yes. It was very close to the Uganda/Congo/Sudan border. There was a large encampment of tents of NGOs and UN, that were already based there and setting up an assistance program in anticipation of concluding the CPA. Because what was very clear to the larger UN community was that, if this is to work – and we all wanted it to work – and people who fled were to come back and have a livelihood, much needed to be done. Roads, land mine clearing, building of schools. Very little existed. And this was an inter-agency effort. USAID was there in a big way with its own programs too. So I went down there.

*Q: You say this was all happening because people felt the CPA was about to be signed and they were just getting ready?*

A: Field and feasibility studies.

*Q: Right. Now you went a couple of times, so you went just before and a couple of times after. Is that correct? The signing of the CPA.*

A: No. I only went to south Sudan once. And I went to Darfur once. Both times I stopped in Khartoum.

*Q: We are looking at the CPA. Even from hearsay, or from what you were able to observe or read about, which I think you probably had to do in order to work with UNHCR at that time, what was your sense of the CPA process? It was a very long, complicated series of agreements, commissions set up and different parties brokering the talks. We are interested in both the process that produced the signing of the agreements...*

A: I can't help you with what I don't know. And I did not get involved at all with the process.

*Q: Of course, I understand. Part 2 is implementation, if you have any sense of that. What is your sense of the North-South situation since January of 05?*

A: I was in the UN, so what I know better is what the UN did. The UN of course needed a partner down there, and we were very excited for the CPA to get signed so we could have a partner and get started with the reconstruction. It kept getting delayed. I met with Garang while I was down there. But the base camp then moved to Juba. And my sense of it was that, this always happens, everybody and his brother piles in. Every NGO, every UN agency, USAID, the Swedes, everybody. And they wasted all their energies coordinating. All you ever heard about was coordinating. And all you ever heard about was squabbles about coordination. Jan Pronk did a very good job; he was in charge of the coordination. But when so-and-so ambassador was always mad at my guy in Khartoum because he had a rough personality, and we were always getting these complaints, and the Dutch – I flew to Oslo for the fund-raising conference, and she pulled me aside and said “I want you to fire him” – meaning the UNHCR representative in Khartoum. There were all these dramas. So you had to wonder with all of this. I think she may have been right,

actually, and ultimately we did move him out. But with all of this energy spent on coordination you had to wonder about what was actually going on. And my sense of it was at the end of the day millions of dollars were spent, but you couldn't really point to millions of dollars worth of projects for the people. A lot of it was spent on overhead.

*Q: So I gather turf battles didn't serve a positive purpose. I think that's part of what I'm hearing. If you could have coordinated yourself, with the various parties involved – the Norwegians, the Dutch ...*

A: They're donors to UNHCR, so they're very important to us. And they're sort of our overseers to make sure that we do it right. I think the problem within UNHCR was our own planning. Our own planning was faulty. Our concept was community-based development. We would go in, build a school, build a clinic, and build a road. And then that would attract people to come back to it. But what was not done was to determine – I mean it didn't work and refugees did not return. Because that may not have been their village. They may be sitting in a Ugandan camp or Kenyan camp and they want to go home, but the one place you put the school maybe ten miles from their village, so it doesn't do them any good.

*Q: It sounds like a good example of what was done wrong. Can you derive any lessons? You say the planning was faulty. If you could relive it, how might you have planned differently?*

A: We spent a lot, we raised a lot – the first year, \$60 million dollars, spent it all. But we didn't do strategic planning. By that I mean set the objective, set your targets, measure your targets to how you're doing. The only thing that matters, really, for our piece of it, was the return of the refugees. So were we spending our funds on helping people go home? No we didn't, and people didn't go home. We did spend our money but we had a huge staff, and we bought the housing and we bought the trucks. And by the time the first year was over we put in all the infrastructure for our operations, but we couldn't show that anybody had come home. And there may have been a few schools and a few clinics built, but not much. So we had very little to show for the first year.

*Q: You said there was little or no strategic planning. Would that be normal for UNHCR operations? Or was it that it was done so quickly that there wasn't time to do strategic planning?*

A: There are other operations that have been much better – our operations in Afghanistan went much better. I think this was poorly done because we selected the wrong person to do it. And a lot was spent on overhead.

So on the second year, I tried to hold back the funds until the strategic planning was done. And instead of providing the funds from an envelope, so it could all get spent on overhead, I wanted to parcel the money out on actually having people come home. And that didn't happen. In fact we assisted very people to go home – a few from Ethiopia, a few from Central African Republic, but for the most part very few have gone back from

the major camps which were in Uganda and Kenya. And part of that was because they were much better off there. So there was no ...

*Q: Incentive?*

A: Well, yeah, but there was also no parallel planning. We didn't reduce our assistance – like shut-down schools – in the camps in Uganda and Kenya as an incentive for them to go back.

*Q: So in retrospect, might you have done that?*

A: Yeah.

*Q: Was there any other factor that discouraged returning home? Was there politics involved? Was there logistics? Obstacles? Or was it really just people's desire ...*

A: People's desire. We would have provided the trucks, we would have helped them with transport to get home and we would have provided basic supplies for the first three months. But they weren't going back to much. There wasn't anything there. When I visited, on another trip – it wasn't to Sudan, but it was to the South Sudanese camps – Kukuma, for example in Kenya – beautiful high school. A thousand kids. I stopped and one young teen-ager, a seventeen-year-old girl gets up and says, “Why should I go home, if I go home my education stops, since there are no schools there, and I fall right back into the culture of South Sudan, which means they'll marry me off for 40 buffalo to some really old man. And what are you going to do to protect me from that?”

*Q: Is there a good answer to that question?*

A: I didn't have a good answer. I did go to the Minister of Justice, told him that story and asked them to build it into their laws.

*Q: How long had they been in Kenya?*

A: Well, her whole life.

*Q: As the civil war was going on, the lucky ones, one might say, got out.*

A: Yeah. They were very old and very established. The Kukuma camp, for example, has vocation schools, high schools – it's a very established town, very nice.

*Q: Do you think people should have been encouraged or coerced or in some other way convinced to return?*

A: We don't, as a matter of UNHCR policy, we will only help people go home if it's voluntary.

*Q: That's what I thought.*

A: And the dirty little secret of the refugee is that a lot of people don't ever want to go home. But then there's tension. Because the Kenyan government says, "Yeah, but we don't want to be hosts." The Pakistanis say the same thing with the Afghans. So it's always a messy ending with these things.

*Q: What do you imagine will happen to these IDPs, at best? They're still in this situation, when you last saw them, correct?*

A: The IDPs?

*Q: Yes.*

A: Now, I understand that a lot of them have gone back to the South. That there have been a lot of people who have gone back to the South. Very few have been refugees from abroad, most of them have been IDPs. And the government has very much pushed them out, pushed them back. The in-country people. And they've largely had to go back on their own. And there have been some stories of people who have just taken off on foot and been robbed and raped along the way, but managed to get home. And then they find very little there once they get home.

*Q: To compare one calamity to another, from one what you saw and what you've heard, the situation of IDPs in the South, and maybe we could mention Darfur. Do you think the North-South situation is at all going forward? Is there any progress?*

A: Well, we had hoped ... we were optimistic around the time of Oslo. And hoping that if the CPA worked, and all the money that was pouring in worked, and people went back, and if we could establish stability in the South, that stability would spread. That has not happened. In fact it has gone quite the other way. I get the impression that the new leaders, as a result of the CPA, that have assumed ministerial positions in Khartoum, have quickly just been accommodated in the government. In other words, I don't see them pushing so hard. They're not revolutionary any more, and I see them getting very comfortable. Khartoum is growing. With all the oil money, and there's a lot of money to be made. I don't see them pushing for the people that much.

*Q: Let me be bold and mention the word corruption. A number of our interviewees have stated that they believe that Khartoum regime is co-opting leaders from the South, and people from the South to go into Khartoum.*

A: That's my impression.

*Q: That's your impression. Do you have...*

A: I have no stories or proof. But it was my impression. Why do I say that? Just the ministers would come to visit me, not from my visit there but they would come to



Geneva, and they would sort of talk the Khartoum party line rather than pushing for half of the people.

*Q: Understanding that you haven't been there recently ... Between the Southerners who are working in the regime in Khartoum versus Southerners working in the Government of Southern Sudan, do you see a distinction? Or do you have any knowledge of...*

A: Well the only people that I met would have been in late '06, September/October '06. There were Southerners working in Khartoum and they were pretty fat and happy. Those were the ones who come to visit in Geneva. I never got back to the South.

*Q: We've heard from some that the Southern government, while they're trying, they lack the capacity. And that in some cases they are bought off.*

A: That was my impression.

*Q: Well let's shift to Darfur, since you were there. You've given us a pretty gloomy picture of what you saw in the North-South ... the people from the South and their efforts to get home, in some cases going home to nothing.*

A: Yeah, most of them were IDPs going home to very little.

*Q: Right. What did you see in Darfur?*

A: In Darfur, taking off in the airplane and flying over, you could see village after village completely burned down. We stopped at one large refugee camp of about 10,000/15,000 people. And UNHCR had set that up, and our partner was IRC. They were caring for the people. The people had water, they had food, clothing distributions, they were setting up a women's center. The problem at that time was that the women would have to go out and look for firewood. And when they would go out they would get raped. So we organized the AU, and we organized stoves that use less fuel. So we did what we could.

*Q: When was that?*

A: This was also in '05.

*Q: Do you feel, as many do, that the North-South was a bad situation for 25-30 years (depending on how you're counting), then a settlement was made and suddenly Darfur overshadowed what was happening? Do you have a view of the extent to which Darfur has obscured progress with the North-South conflict? Is that getting too political?*

A: Yeah, I tried.

*Q: You saw villages burned out, did you have a sense of who was doing this stuff? The Janjaweed, who was behind them?*

A: We heard stories of villages who had seen government airplanes assisting the Janjaweed. Then we took the helicopter up very far north, in west Darfur. To a village that was right along the Chadian border. And talked to the people there.

And just to give you an example, we're standing there and it's blazing hot, like 120 degrees, it was unbelievable. And then we see this camel with this guy riding up. And it was very glamorous, this guy in a blue outfit on this camel with heavy daggers up here, daggers here, daggers there. I thought it was just stunning. So I sort of went up to him, and of course wherever I go, AU soldiers come. And I started talking to him, and he pulled his knife like this. And the police, the official police accompanying us from Khartoum, got very frightened. They said "Come, let's go." So we ran to the helicopter and left. And obviously he was a Janjaweed scout, wondering what we were all about.

*Q: What was the point of the dagger? A threat to you?*

A: I don't know.

*Q: Just trying to be impressive?*

A: Yeah. He was just a teenager, to tell you the truth. So then, in the helicopter, we went about 500 meters. I don't know why we couldn't have just gone in a car or walked, why we had to take the helicopter. We went to an area with bushes. There didn't seem to be anything there. When we walked to the trees, the shady part, every tenth tree or so would have a little cluster of women and children. And they were IDPs that had fled from their villages. And they don't like to go too far because goats and donkeys are a bit like cats. They'll go back to their town, they are territorial.

So all their goats and donkeys are back at their villages which have just been burnt down. The men would go back and take care of their livestock and the women would be here. And they had nothing. So that was our job in UNHCR. We'd find these little clumps of people and we'd bring them whatever they needed, whether it was water or whatever. And I recall coming up, and as I approached them one woman just went nuts. Because she was afraid – she saw these great big African Union soldiers and the fear that followed the uniform just set her off. So we told them to go away and we women sat and talked to each other. But they had been through some very bad experiences with guys in uniforms.

*Q: What did you think UNHCR was able to do for them? Temporary remedies?*

A: We would bring them supplies if they needed it, food. We would transport them to a camp if they wanted it – most of the time they didn't. In the camps, our headquarters there talked to our folks, and they ... for example, in one big IDP camp, our guys had found this tiny little girl, eight years old, sitting on the corner all by herself, and for the last four days she'd been raped multiple times. So we were able to find her and take care of her. And then we created shelter for the abandoned children. So that was the kind of thing we could do. But we really couldn't do much beyond that. You really can't protect people.

*Q: I know you were doing humanitarian work, which is not political by definition, but do you feel, or did you feel, that the regime was standing in your way?*

A: Oh yes. And a mayor, this year, just a few months before I left, which was about six months ago, they would hijack ... we really couldn't even leave the towns any more – they would hijack our vehicles. And so there was a point about six or eight months ago when we realized we were doing nothing, because we couldn't even leave our compounds. So we actually reduced our staffing.

*Q: What would you guess was the point of this harassing? Just to prevent you from seeing what was going on?*

A: Yeah, they didn't want westerners there. They were getting a lot of bad publicity. What we would be reporting back to the International Court of Justice. And their officials were getting indicted. So they were trying to intimidate us.

*Q: An American diplomat said a few weeks ago that he felt conditions were getting better in Darfur, if I remember correctly. He said that people were being fed and educated. Perhaps we're talking 2007, I don't know.*

A: Well maybe. I don't know. WFP always did a pretty good job of getting the food in.

*Q: Well, UNHCR, humanitarian work which doesn't control policy or balance of power. I won't ask you to hypothesize what should be done by the politicians. If you have any comments, I'll welcome them. But if not, the humanitarian work that you did – how do you think it could have been done more effectively, given the very imperfect politics that you have to work in? Do you think, looking back, that with a really bad deck of cards, you did pretty well?*

A; I think we spent a lot of money, but I think we wasted a lot of money on overhead. And I would also be very skeptical, there's a dynamic: when an American diplomat says "Well, they're getting food, and they're getting education," understand that he's getting much of his information from international workers, and international workers are going to say "Oh we've done a good job, we've taking your \$20 million and this is what we've done."

In fact \$20 million would have been spent, yes. But whether its been spent on education, whether people got educated – which is the impact of the aid – or it was spent on a project called education, meaning 20 Land Rovers were bought and 60 people got their salaries for a year and houses wee built, you know. It's hard to say.

*Q: You said you were on the ground in the South, and I don't know, maybe in Darfur also, with other NGOs. Did you have any sense of what they were doing? You heard their stories of what they said they were accomplishing. Did you actually see them?*

A: No, I went down and saw the structures that were being rebuilt, and saw some projects for removing land mines – and it was important that that was being done. It was a lot of very sincere people, and a lot of work was being done. But the need was so huge, and such a vast amount of land to cover.

*Q: You mentioned earlier the lack of coordination. Was that also a factor in the many NGOs? Did they have their objectives pretty well parceled out so that they weren't duplicating?*

A: Well that was Jan Pronck's job. And he's a very good guy. It was just hard. It's very difficult to task.

*Q: Well I wish we could get a video of what you saw, but I guess we can't. I'd like to give you a chance to add anything at all. If you had a message to deliver to the readers of this study eventually, what might that be?*

A. [No answer.]

*Q. Thank you very much.*