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Chad: Refugee women face high levels of rape inside and outside camps despite UN presence

Darfuri refugee women and girls face high levels of rape and other violence on a daily basis both inside and outside refugee camps in eastern Chad, despite the presence of UN security forces, a new Amnesty International report reveals.

In *No place for us here: Violence against refugee women in eastern Chad*, Amnesty International documents rape and other violence against women and girls in the camps, who face attacks carried out by villagers living nearby and members of the Chadian National Army.

“The rape that countless women and girls experienced in Darfur continues to haunt them in eastern Chad,” said Tawanda Hondora, Deputy Director of Amnesty International’s Africa Programme.

“These women fled Darfur, hoping that the international community and Chadian authorities would offer them some measure of safety and protection. That protection has proved to be elusive and they remain under attack.”

The report says that refugee girls also experience sexual harassment at the hands of their teachers at schools in the camps. Some girls have reportedly been threatened that they would receive poor marks if they refused to have sexual intercourse with their teacher, leading some to drop out of school.

“Many people know that women who venture outside refugee camps in eastern Chad to collect firewood and water face harassment and rape,” said Tawanda Hondora. “What people don’t realize is that there is little safety inside the camps for these same women. They face the risk of rape and other violence at the hands of family members, other refugees, and staff of humanitarian organizations, whose task it is to provide them with assistance and support.”

The DIS (Détachement Intégré de Sécurité – or Integrated Security Unit), a Chadian police force supported by the UN Mission in the Central African Republic and Chad (MINURCAT), has been given specific responsibility for providing security in and around refugee camps and is now fully deployed, with more than 800 officers in the 12 refugee camps in eastern Chad.

However, members of the DIS have been direct targets of violence and some DIS officers have even committed human rights violations themselves.

Most refugee women and girls do not feel that the DIS has done much to address the insecurity they are facing.

“The DIS spends a lot of time protecting themselves. Even the UN soldiers have to protect them. No one seems to have much time to protect us,” said one woman interviewed by Amnesty International researchers at Gaga Refugee Camp.

Perpetrators of rape and other forms of violence against refugee women and girls in eastern Chad are very rarely brought to justice. This is the case even when survivors report rape and other attacks to the local Chadian authorities, the DIS or to refugee camps leaders.

“The deeply-entrenched culture of impunity throughout eastern Chad – especially when it comes to rape and other forms of violence against women – must end immediately,” said Tawanda Hondora.

The use of traditional dispute resolution methods to find “negotiated” settlements to cases of rape and other violence against women and girls also perpetuates impunity and furthers violence.

A 13-year-old girl in Farchana Refugee Camp was raped by a Chadian nurse working for an organization that manages health centres in the camp. She became pregnant following the rape and gave birth in January 2009. The man accepted that he was responsible for the pregnancy and negotiations were conducted with him, after which he agreed to marry the girl and pay a dowry to her family. He later fled the area. Despite complaints being filed with Chadian officials, by May 2009 it did not appear that there had been any effort to find him, nor had any legal action been initiated against him.

Amnesty International said that it is not possible to know the exact number of women and girls who have been victims of rape and other violence inside and outside refugee camps in eastern Chad, as women rarely report such crimes primarily because of fear of stigma, including from their own family members, and trauma.

“Married women who have been raped are often shunned or abandoned by their husbands, while girls and young women who have been raped very often find it difficult to marry. As a result, most women and girls choose to remain silent about rape to avoid the negative social consequences – meaning the perpetrators get away with their crimes,” said Tawanda Hondora.

Amnesty International called for immediate, effective steps to be taken by both the Chadian government and the international community to address the pervasive and systematic rape and other forms of violence against Darfuri refugee women and girls in eastern Chad.

“A clear and comprehensive plan that makes it clear that rape and sexual violence are unacceptable crimes should be put in place immediately, and relevant Chadian laws enforced,” said Tawanda Hondora.

“The plan should address the range of circumstances that put women and girls at risk of rape and other forms of violence inside and outside the refugee camps and the ways in which both national and international actors can help to protect women from these terrible crimes.”

Notes to editors:

- Eastern Chad is home to approximately 260,000 refugees from Darfur, most of whom are women and children and many of whom have been in the area for more than five years. The refugees reside in 12 different camps spread out along the length of the Chad/Darfur border.
- Over the past six years, more than 142,000 women and girls have fled insecurity and widespread human rights violations in Sudan’s troubled Darfur region, seeking safety and protection in neighbouring eastern Chad.
- A UN mission in the Central African Republic and Chad (MINURCAT) has been deployed in eastern Chad since September 2007 with a mandate that includes contributing to the protection of the refugees.
- To see a full copy of the report *No place for us here: Violence against refugee women in eastern Chad*,

please click [here](#).

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