

ANNEX

Oral summary of the Chairman of the Executive Committee
on his visit to Chad/Sudan (West Darfur)
presented to the Standing Committee on 8 March 2005

From 29 January to 6 February, I undertook a field mission as Chairman of the Executive Committee in order to assess in situ some of UNHCR's operations in Chad and Sudan which are among the most important and critical in the world, as a consequence of the crisis in the Darfur region.

The delegation accompanying me and I witnessed first-hand a humanitarian tragedy whose sharp characteristics will start softening once we progress towards a negotiated political and peaceful solution in Darfur.

I was impressed by the moral strength and the exceptional will to survive of the refugees in Chad and the internally displaced in Sudan with whom we met. It is worth asking: "What would be the present situation of these tens of thousands of refugees and displaced in the region without the presence of UNHCR, other humanitarian agencies and NGOs?"

The working meetings, press conferences, interviews, testimonies and trips held in N'Djamena, Abeche and Bahai in Chad and in El Geneina and Khartoum in Sudan will long remain in my memory. Thanks to all these experiences, I reaffirm the need for greater involvement by the international community in this crisis, as well as to emphasize the work of UNHCR and the humanitarian community which is taking place, and which has to continue to take place in the region.

One of my conclusions from this mission is that the donor community should provide an appropriate response to the so-called supplementary fund for Chad and Darfur. Presently, this situation needs to be treated as an emergency programme. Donors have to closely examine the role of protection and its priorities; some initiatives and pilot projects proposed by UNHCR for Darfur must be considered and supported.

In effect, any contingency plan in Chad is affected by the physical limitations on the country to receive new refugee influxes. At the same time, repatriation is not viable until a political solution to the conflict in Sudan, and in particular in Darfur is achieved, providing the conditions for a safe and dignified voluntary return, including guarantees necessary for life and for survival.

Although there has been progress regarding the definition of mandates and competencies of all actors in the field, in some cases through ad hoc measures and in other cases with more formal mechanisms, such as the Letter of Understanding of 31 January 2005, this issue still requires urgent attention.

The so-called "North-South Peace Agreement" will favourably influence a pacific and negotiated solution for the situation in Darfur. Although there are several points of view about its potential impact, the international community has to promote its implementation in

order to constitute a vehicle for peace throughout the country. Indeed, this Agreement could potentially constitute a future starting point for the return of some refugees and internally displaced persons, always taking into account the required conditions of security and survival.

I cannot neglect to mention the increasing and important role of non-governmental organisations. It would be just impossible to assist so many persons in need of protection without the cooperation and assistance of NGOs. A continued development of cooperation between UNHCR and NGOs is therefore crucial. The adoption of codes of conduct for all humanitarian actors in the field also needs to be stimulated.

The origins of the tragic conflict in Darfur, with the unacceptable loss of lives as well as the human suffering, are extremely complex. However, a negotiated solution between all parties is clearly required. It is imperative to act with good faith to stop the violence and the human suffering. The international community, through the United Nations, with the invaluable participation of the African Union, has to intensify its efforts with this aim.

I would like to express my appreciation to the staff of UNHCR and NGOs in Chad and Sudan who contributed to the preparation and organisation of my mission.

My thanks to the Governments of Chad and Sudan for their hospitality and collaboration that permitted us to undertake these successful visits.