

Camp Kounoungo



Protection Profile: In January and February 2008 the Government of Sudan began new air strikes in Darfur that pushed 20,000 new refugees to the Chad/Darfur border. For months these refugees sat on the border with little more than what they ran with. NGOs servicing Kounoungo and Mile traveled as often as possible to provide them with a little food and water, forcing them to shrink rations elsewhere. During these visits aid workers could hear, see and feel the continuing air raids in Darfur, sometimes making it impossible to reach this new population more than a few times a month. Many were relocated to Camps Kounoungo and Mile, and still many stayed behind, to try to survive in make-shift homes, until they can return to Darfur. As insecurity increases, and aid worker contracts expire, positions in this country become increasingly difficult to fulfill. And in the end with all this chaos around them, it is the refugees who suffer.

The area is rife with banditry, and NGO cars are highly prized as they are made for rough desert terrain and the high wadi waters during rainy season. The mounted UNHCR flags once protected these vehicles and declared them neutral, but here, they become the bulls-eye of the target. Drivers and workers are sometimes let go unharmed, and other times they are not so lucky.

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As of March 2008 there are 256,341 refugees in camps in Eastern Chad.

Camp Profile: Camp Kounoungo, located near a small Chadian village, is virtually alone, tucked between dry riverbeds known as wadis, and small hills shaded in reds and browns. The drive from the nearest NGO headquarters is, at minimum, 45 minutes barring no rain, bandits, or trucks getting stuck in the sand. NGOs arrive around 9am and leave the camp just after noon, leaving the camp unattended most of the time due to staff restrictions and insecurity. The camp, like many, was constructed early on in a grid system; upon arrival families and communities were grouped together in zones. The first 14,000 refugees arrived as long ago as 5 years. Attacks inside of Darfur in January 2008 pushed this camp to its stated limit of 20,000. It can't hold any more, the already depleted resources and overworked NGOs would not be able to service them.

The camp has two primary schools, both of which provide schooling through level, or grade, 7. It is mostly girls who attend these schools. Maybe because this is the first time that they have been given the opportunity to learn math, Arabic, and science, or maybe it is because there are more girls who have survived the destruction of their homeland. A local principal stressed that by gaining an education, his people, when there is peace, will be able to build "a stronger Darfur."

But for now, resources are stretched thin. There is no secondary school. And many of the people living in Camp Kounoungo do not have enough to eat. Their tents are tattered and they, like many others in Darfur refugee camps, are beginning to build small structures that might hold the rain, wind, and sun out during their so-called temporary stay,



Abakar lives in Camp Kounoungou. This camp is close to the border with Darfur and has been in the middle of a lot of trouble, including conflict between tribes and between the government and rebels. New refugees have recently arrived because the government of Sudan continues to destroy villages in Darfur.



Fatima lives in camp Kounoungou, in Eastern Chad. She is a part of a large group of women that belong to the same family. They all get together at Fatne's tent, the woman elder of the family. Fatima's camp has been receiving new arrivals, refugees that have had to flee their villages in Darfur after new attacks by the government and the Janjaweed.



Anima, part of a large family of women who walked for days to reach Camp Kounoungou, attends school to fill her days in the camp. She is shy, but laughs when she is with her girlfriends at school, especially the day we went to school with her.



Fadila is a strong woman who lives at refugee camp Farchana, in Eastern Chad. She and other women in her camp are the main reason all the children around them are alive. They carry and guide them out of the burning villages; hide them from attackers during the day; find food to feed them; dig deep holes to get water for them to drink; and then give them love and hope at the camps. She is grateful for the assistance they receive as refugees, but Fadila wants more for her children and all the children of Darfur.