

Summary

Violent militia attacks in eastern Chad claimed more than 300 lives in late 2006, primarily in the rural southeast, along the Chad-Sudan border. Children were shot and killed, women were raped, and villages were looted and burned, displacing more than 17,000 civilians in November alone. Most attacks were carried out by ethnic militias, and most victims belonged to non-Arab ethnic groups, though there are significant exceptions. Meanwhile, militia groups and Sudanese rebel movements with bases in the area have been responsible for the recruitment and use of child soldiers. These abuses constitute serious violations of international humanitarian law.

Three sometimes overlapping patterns of violence are conspiring to bring eastern Chad to the brink of a human rights and humanitarian disaster: internal armed conflict between the Chadian government and rebel groups; cross-border militia attacks against civilians; and communal violence.

The Chadian government has committed substantial financial and military resources to quashing anti-government insurgent movements, but this has largely come at the expense of protecting civilians, particularly in rural areas in east of the country where militia attacks and communal violence have become commonplace. Chadian security forces have failed to prevent cross-border raids by so-called “Janjaweed” militias from Sudan on villages in eastern Chad, and have been unwilling or unable to check the activities of abusive armed groups inside its borders. There have been no investigations into killings, incidents of rape or other forms of abuse and the perpetrators of serious crimes are enjoying total impunity.

As a consequence of the government’s failure to impose order and accountability, civilians in the volatile border zone have been forced to provide for their own protection by organizing self-defense forces and entering into security alliances with neighboring militias, usually along ethnic lines. In some instances, these community-based militias have been trained, organized and supplied by Sudanese rebel groups that operate in eastern Chad with the support and backing of the Chadian government.

Human Rights Watch received credible reports that in other parts of Chad security officials are exploiting ethnic differences and triggering communal violence in the short-term pursuit of strategic advantage in counterinsurgency efforts, through distributing weapons to the traditional adversaries of some of the ethnic groups that are associated with the Chadian rebel movements. Human Rights Watch is concerned that the Chadian security officials may be using similar tactics in eastern Chad in an attempt to weaken Chadian rebel movements, many of which are confederations of ethnic-based militias.

Ethnic groups in eastern Chad have become polarized by the sectarian nature of the recent violence, wherein militia raids tend to skirt Arab villages, even in hard-hit border areas that are largely abandoned due to insecurity. As arms and ammunition flow into the region and communities become increasingly militarized, eastern Chad stands at the brink of widespread communal violence.

Although the operational environment is clearly difficult, there is an urgent need for an increased international presence in Chad in order to prevent the situation deteriorating even further, with disastrous results not just for civilians in Chad but for those in the wider region, including Darfur and northeastern Central African Republic. The proposed international presence in Chad should include both military personnel and officials from the UN Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights to monitor, investigate, and publicly report on the human rights implications of the twin aspects of the Chadian crisis—internal political strife and the insinuation of the Darfur conflict into community life in eastern Chad.

The United Nations Security Council should authorize an international presence of military personnel and human rights monitors along the Chad/Sudan border to deter further attacks on civilians, to monitor the complex political and social dynamics that contribute to communal violence, to provide essential information on human rights issues that are currently ignored, to support civilian protection efforts, and to inform future UN and international responses to the crisis in eastern Chad. Additionally, an international presence could monitor the Darfur arms embargo and the movement of armed groups in the border zone.

The Security Council should also call on the Sudanese government to cease support of armed groups responsible for abuses against civilians and on the government of Chad to cease support for Darfur rebel factions and armed groups responsible for attacks on civilians, the recruitment and use of child soldiers, and other human rights abuses. The government of Chad must take urgent action to restore law and order, including conducting impartial investigations and taking other actions as needed to bring perpetrators of human rights abuses to justice.

Methodology

From October 18 to November 30, 2006, a Human Rights Watch research mission documented recent incidents of attacks on civilians in Chad, primarily in the east of the country, along the Chad/Sudan border. Human Rights Watch conducted more than 100 interviews with victims of violence and other eyewitnesses, traditional leaders, tribal leaders, Chadian government officials, national and international humanitarian aid workers, hospital and health center staff, nomads, refugees and displaced persons, and members of armed groups, including the Sudanese military, the Chadian military, Sudanese rebel movements, Chadian rebel movements, and village-based self-defense militia.

In most cases, the names of individuals interviewed have been withheld to protect their privacy and ensure their safety. For the same reason, other identifying information, such as the location of interviews, has, in some instances, also been withheld.

Recommendations

To the United Nations Security Council

- Take all necessary measures, including the urgent passage of any relevant resolutions, to ensure the deployment of a robust international presence of military personnel and human rights monitors along the Chad/Sudan border with, at minimum, sufficient mandate and resources to protect and deter further attacks on civilians as set forth in Option B of the December 22, 2006 UN Secretary General's report on Chad and the Central African Republic; to monitor the arms embargo established under UN Security Council Resolutions 1556 and 1591 in cooperation with the UN Panel of Experts; to report on the movement of insurgent armed groups across the border; and to investigate and publicly report on cross-border attacks on civilians and other incidents in the border zone.
- Call on the government of Chad to immediately to cease support for armed groups responsible for attacks on civilians, including those factions of the Darfur rebel groups responsible for forced recruitment of refugees and use of child soldiers, and to take urgent action to restore law and order, including by refraining from arming abusive ethnic militias.
- Call for the immediate establishment of an office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in Chad with a mandate to monitor and publicly report on human rights violations throughout the country, including in the context of conflict.
- Call on UN member states to support the activities of an office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in Chad and along the border with Sudan with sufficient funding and other support.
- Call on UN member states to ensure full support to humanitarian activities benefiting Sudanese refugees and Chadian internally displaced persons.

To the Government of Chad

- Immediately cease support for abusive Darfur rebel groups and other abusive armed groups, support the deployment of a strengthened international force in Darfur and along the border with Chad to deter further attacks on civilians, monitor the existing UN arms embargo, and help implement the Tripoli Agreement of February 2006 between Sudan and Chad.
- Deploy sufficient military personnel, police, and resources to conflict areas in eastern Chad, including parts of the Ouaddaï and Salamat regions and the Dar Tama and Dar Sila administrative departments, and as required in other areas mandated to ensure that civilians are protected from further attack.
- Investigate and bring to justice all those individuals involved in attacks on civilians.
- Take action to ensure the demobilization all child soldiers and end the recruitment of children under the age of 18 by armed groups operating on Chadian territory. Take steps to bring to account those who have recruited and used child soldiers.

To the Government of Sudan

- Cease support for armed groups responsible for attacks on civilians in Chad, including with arms and other forms of support.
- Support the immediate deployment of a strengthened international force with UN elements in Darfur and along the border with Chad to deter further attacks on civilians, monitor the existing UN arms embargo and help implement the Tripoli Agreement of February 2006 between Sudan and Chad.

To the Sudanese Rebel Movements

- Take all necessary steps to ensure combatants under your control comply with international humanitarian law and hold accountable those who fail to do so.
- Cease support for abusive militias, Chadian self-defense groups and all other armed groups responsible for attacks against civilians.
- Immediately end the recruitment and use of child soldiers, and demobilize existing child soldiers.

To the Chadian Rebel Movements

- Take all necessary steps to ensure combatants under your control comply with international humanitarian law and hold accountable those who fail to do so.