

## **Visit Report to Chad and Cameroon**

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### ***Report on Visit to Chad and Mbal Mayo Strategy Meeting of Chadian and Cameroonian NGOs***

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#### (1) Political Context in Chad

After taking power in a military coup in 1990, Idriss Deby, the president of Chad, and his political party, the Patriotic Salvation Movement (Movement Patriotique pour le Salut, MPS), held elections in 1996 and 1997. This year's State Department Report on Human Rights cites credible reports which describe the elections as marred by "fraud, widespread vote-rigging and local irregularities." At present, the government is preparing presidential elections which are scheduled for May 20th, 2001 and civil society organizations expect more of the same. There is little hope that positive change might result from the election.

AIDS is a fast growing problem in Chad and the electoral campaign message below which can be seen in the capital is one more indication of how the Chadian government is the willing to go to any length to stay in power:

"The President of the Republic and the Prime Minister are the guarantee of your security concerning AIDS".

Ordinary citizens in Chad are discouraged and, according to local newspapers, the participation in an on-going census is very low. People are afraid to speak out and prefer not to be identified with the opposition. The economic and social situation has gotten worse and most people are concerned about day-to-day survival. According to human rights organizations in Chad and the U.S. State Department, security forces continue to commit serious human rights abuses with impunity and citizens do not have access to an independent judicial

system.

## (2) Governmental Action on the Project

The death of Mr. Dady, the General Secretary of the Presidency who was the main official in charge of the oil project, and of Almine Mahamat, the Minister of Plan, in a plane crash in February may have left the government without detailed information on the management of the project. That information had been closely held by Dady who managed the project directly on behalf of the president.

### *The College de Controle*

The principal safeguard put in place by the World Bank to ensure that revenues from the oil project are used for the intended purposes of poverty alleviation is the "College de Control." This monitoring body was established by the Law on the Management of the Oil Revenue and includes civil society participation. But until today the College de Control is not effective and the government shows little willingness to have it function in an independent fashion.

The President nominated the members of the "College de Control" (CC) on December 4th, 2000. However, the regulations (decret d'application) on how the CC is to function have not been published. The CC members have taken the initiative and come up with draft regulations which they submitted to the government. The government erased the substantive parts from this draft and presented its own draft which makes no reference to the independence of the CC. It also limits the area of action of the CC to the oil fields of Komé, Miandoum, and Bolobo and requires the CC to only report to the government. The CC on its own cannot take initiatives. The government's draft proposes a decision-making process based on a simple majority system which would assure that the government would always have the majority because five out of the nine members of the CC are government representatives.

Although the regulations are not yet in place, the government has tried to obtain CC endorsement for some expenses paid out of the remaining amount of the bonus received from the oil companies. No documentation for this was represented to the CC and the CC refused to endorse something based on verbal communication.

The CC has been portrayed by the World Bank and other donors as the main instrument to ensure government accountability concerning the management of the oil revenues and the flow of benefits to the citizens of the country.

### (3) World Bank Plans

A meeting with the World Bank's resident mission in N'Djaména revealed the following information:

- (a) A new project on "good governance" for the Chadian government is being prepared;
- (b) The Bank is examining the possibility of sending an expert to Chad to help with public relations work – the government is doing a bad job in this regard;
- (c) A rural development project for the oil producing region is currently being identified;
- (d) The World Bank (IDF) has given the Chadian government \$ 300,000 to help build NGO-capacity;
- (e) A new structural adjustment plan is planned for July 2001. The government has fulfilled all conditionalities except for some macro-economic problems which are the result of the budget deficit which is caused by the war being fought in the northern part of the country;
- (f) The Bank has requested an audit of how the Bonus money has been used by the government.

### (1) The French Role

The First Secretary of the French Embassy calls the Chad/Cameroon Oil Project the world's most scrutinized and controlled project. He added that the pedagogy of the World Bank and the IMF is leading to a situation where the project will result in serious progress.

After human rights organizations explained their concerns regarding the project, he accused NGOs of looking for perfection.

The Chadian government has requested the support of France for 4,000 gendarmery and national guard forces. France is likely to agree to the request but is concerned about a duplication of responsibilities amongst the various armed forces of the government.

Concerning security of the project, former French military officials who had been stationed in the region are being hired to help ensure security of the project. This security has numerous layers. Esso has its own security arrangements and each of the contractors also has private security arrangements.

France has only disbursed one third of its aid budget for Chad because of a lack of projects. France will provide financial support for the upcoming elections, but will not play a role in organizing the elections.

## (2) The U.S. Role

The First Counselor of the U.S. Embassy expressed concern about how the bonus money had been used and stated that the Chadian government had lost a lot of credibility as a result.

After listening to the concerns of human rights organizations, he said that the U.S. would keep the pressure on the government. But he also stressed that the U.S. could not do much because after the departure of U.S. AID from Chad, the embassy did not have the leverage of financial resources to get its voice heard by the government.

When asked about possible protection for human rights activists, he responded that he could not help because the embassy was relying on Chadian government security forces for its own protection.

The current U.S. ambassador to Chad is a former official of the U.S. Department of Agriculture and had just arranged for a shipment of 10 million tons of cereal to the southern part of the country where it is to be sold through services provided by two U.S. NGOs, Africare and World Vision.

While this will bring excess U.S. production to the market, it is unclear where the benefits for the local population are from such a grain shipment.

## (3) Visit to Esso Project Site in Doba

As one approaches the Esso project site outside of the small town of Doba, one appears to be entering a different country. The signs on the well-maintained roads are mostly in English, sometimes with French translation. Large areas continue to be cleared with massive new

machinery to make way for the project infra-structure. An airfield with a large run-way and small jets sits in the middle of the forest. There is heavy security at the iron gates leading into the Esso office compound. The compound itself with its many rows of mobile office buildings, parking lots and flower beds transmits the feeling of American suburbia. Inside the offices, the humming sounds of computers presents a stark contrast with the surrounding areas. Electricity or running water are unheard of in the small villages of lovely dome-shaped straw houses. These are even rare or inexistent in the larger towns. In Moundou, the largest town in the oil producing region, there are almost no phone lines.

At Esso offices in Komé we were received by Mr. Don Rees, a Welshman working for Esso who is in charge of construction work. Mr. Rees showed us his copy of the Environmental Management Plan for the project and called it his "Bible". He gave a presentation on how construction work is addressing the environment:

- Trees with a diameter larger than 20 cm are not be cut, but there will be exceptions (large areas appear to have been clear-cut). But definitely all large trees in the residential areas to be built for project staff will be left standing.
- Water: Not more than 10% of surface water will be taken from the river. The quality of water in existing village wells is being analyzed.
- Landfills: All waste that cannot be incinerated will be put in landfills. Mr. Rees said that there would be no hazardous waste, but that monitoring wells would be put in place to ensure that there is no leaching into the groundwater.
- Sand will have to be taken from the Logone river, but since the river is so large this is not supposed to make much of a difference and the holes dug into the river will get filled back in by nature. But Esso will do a study on this.
- Stone. In addition to sand, the project will need large amounts of stone to make cement. This will be taken from the surrounding landscape.

Mr. Rees was not able to respond to the question of how the oil consortium was paying the Chadian state or local citizens for the water, sand and stone.

Mr. Rees said that compensation was a complicated process and that the project had a socio-economic office with the appropriate database.

He said that it was by mistake that fallow fields had not been included in the compensation agreements but that that mistake would be corrected. He also stated that the road Belabo-Komé would be built to avoid gravesites. The road connections between the three oil fields will try to avoid crops and houses.

He characterized the job opportunities provided by the project as enormous and gave the example of Bero Village where 9 people got recruited for jobs out of a pool of 150 eligible young men.

One of his recruiters had been physically attacked by the disappointed crowds which had been promised employment. He described this as an internal Chadian conflict "Chadians attacking other Chadians".

Mr. Rees had previously worked in Nigeria and other African oil producing countries. He said that his experience leads him to believe that the project will get much bigger over time and thus there will be increased employment opportunities.

### *Conflicts in the Region*

The government and the oil consortium had raised great expectations about job opportunities. However, there are relatively few employment opportunities and conflicts over jobs is on the rise. Local populations say that they are discriminated against and feel that the government and the consortium cheated them: "They told us that we would get jobs and money but nothing is happening, even the unskilled jobs are given to strangers" said one person who requested to remain anonymous. Many people from neighboring villages have migrated to the oil region to look for jobs as a result of the propaganda of the consortium and the government. Amongst the newcomers are large numbers of herders from the northern parts of the country. This is further exacerbating existing conflict between farmers and pastoralists. There are reports that a senior Chadian official working for Esso is helping to bring in northern livestock breeders and their cattle by truck.

The only local organization of the local population EPOZOP (entente des populations de la zone pétrolière) has not received legal recognition from the government and has had to suspend its activities.

The Mbalmayo Meeting of Chadian and Cameroonian NGOs (February 25-28, 2001)

Cameroonian and Chadian NGO's met in Mbalmayo in Cameroon in their first joint meeting to discuss NGO strategy vis-à-vis the project. The objective of the meeting was to define a short-term and a long-term strategy. The goal in the short-term is to avoid a human and ecological disaster as construction of the project proceeds. The long-term goal is to halt the destructive practices of multilateral development banks and transnational corporations.

There were detailed discussions about the project monitoring activities to be put in place in the face of intimidation, lack of security and lack of literacy of the local populations.

Cameroonian NGOs aim at putting a structure in place which will gather information along the 880km long pipeline route. Teams of observers will be sent to the regions. A coalition of NGOs will analyse the information and carry out advocacy efforts to protect the rights of local people.

In CHAD the monitoring structure to be put in place will have offices Bebedja and in N'Djamena with an office for coordination of activities in Moundou in the heart of the oil region. An expert and a secretary will be appointed for each office. The expert will work with human rights and development NGOs and churches to collect information and to take action. The work will be based on EPOZOP's previous work since EPOZOP is the only organization that represents local populations from the oil region. The fact that the government has suspended EPOZOP activities is a serious problem and is of great concern to NGOs in Chad.

The offices in the region will be responsible for circulating information. The "Reseau de Pladoyer" (advocacy network) located in N'Djamena will work with international NGOs to protect the rights of the people.

The Cameroonian and Chadian NGOs present at the meeting prepared a joint letter addressed to President Wolfensohn concerning the terms-of-reference and functioning of the International Advisory Group (IAG). One central concern was the lack of explicit reference to the monitoring of human rights as part of the tasks of the IAG.

A more detailed report on the Mbalmayo meeting will be sent out by the Center for Environment and Development in Cameroon which has organized the meeting.