

The Darfur Crisis: Humanitarian Aid in the Balance

Fabrice Weissman

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Le *Centre de réflexion sur l'action et les savoirs humanitaires* (CRASH) a été créé par Médecins sans frontières en 1999. Sa vocation : stimuler la réflexion critique sur les pratiques de l'association afin d'en améliorer l'action.

Le Crash réalise des études et analyses portant sur l'action de MSF dans son environnement immédiat. Elaborées à partir des cadres et de l'expérience de l'association, ces textes ne représentent pas la « ligne du parti » MSF, pas plus qu'ils ne cherchent à défendre une conception du « vrai humanitaire ». Leur ambition est au contraire de contribuer au débat sur les enjeux, contraintes, limites – et par conséquent dilemmes – de l'action humanitaire. Les critiques, remarques et suggestions sont plus que bienvenues, elles sont attendues.

The *Centre de reflexion sur l'action et les savoirs humanitaires* (CRASH) was created by Médecins Sans Frontières in 1999. Its objective is to encourage debate and critical reflexion on the humanitarian practices of the association.

The Crash carries out in-depth studies and analyses of MSF's activities. This work is based on the framework and experience of the association. In no way, however, do these texts lay down the 'MSF party line', nor do they seek to defend the idea of 'true humanitarianism'. On the contrary, the objective is to contribute to debate on the challenges, constraints and limits –as well as the subsequent dilemmas- of humanitarian action. Any criticisms, remarks or suggestions are most welcome.

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Introduction

Joanne Myers : Good afternoon. I'm Joanne Myers, Director of Public Affairs Programs, and on behalf of the Carnegie Council I'd like to thank you all for joining us.

Today our guest speaker is Fabrice Weissman, with Médecins Sans Frontières, and he is going to be talking to us about "The Darfur Crisis: Humanitarian Aid in the Balance."

For the past four years, Darfur has been a place of bloodshed and banishment. At least 200,000 people have been savagely slaughtered. More than ten times that number have been pushed out of their villages and displaced into camps and the wilderness. These horrific acts are the work of soldiers, pro-government militias, and, more recently, clashes between rebel groups. Despite the widespread killing of civilians, a climate of impunity prevails. From all reports, the humanitarian situation in this western region of the Sudan remains appalling and continues to deteriorate. It is estimated that at least four million people are now dependent on international assistance.

And, even though the President of the Sudan, Omar Hasan al-Bashir, has come under pressure to end the crisis in Darfur, each time envoys from the United Nations and the African Union arrive in Khartoum they depart empty-handed. Round after round of endless talks raise hopes and yield promises that are only to be reneged upon a short time thereafter.

As international organizations seek to help these desperate people, there have been reports that many Sudanese are hindering humanitarian work, preventing the deliverance of much needed assistance, and even killing aid workers in Darfur.

Although a deal with the United Nations was signed last Wednesday, which promised to give aid groups more access to victims of the conflict in the region, there is no guarantee that this pledge will be honoured. In fact, the levels of violence and associated risk have been so high that it is increasingly difficult for Médecins Sans Frontières and other humanitarian aid groups to sustain their assistance.

This afternoon our guest speaker is Fabrice Weissman. Currently he is working as a researcher at MSF's Centre for Reflection [Le Centre de Réflexion sur l'Action et les Savoirs Humanitaires], also known as CRASH, in Paris.

As many of you know, MSF, or Médecins Sans Frontières, is an international humanitarian aid organization, which was established in 1971 to provide emergency medical assistance to populations who are in danger. Their work is carried out in more than seventy countries.

Mr. Weissman has been with MSF since 1995. Among the countries he has worked in are Liberia, the southern Sudan, eastern Sudan, and Kosovo. He was also Head of Mission in Eritrea as well as Guinea-Conakry, and most recently in Darfur. Our speaker is a graduate of the Institut d'Etudes Politiques de Paris and editor of the book *In the Shadow of Just Wars*.

Mr. Weissman will give us a personal account of his work there, what he saw, and what he was able to accomplish. He will also share with us his organization's experiences in delivering medical care in the region.

Remarks

Fabrice Weissman: Thank you very much for this invitation.

As we all know, the Darfur crisis is one of the most serious in the world these days, along with the crisis in the Democratic Republic of Congo, and of course along with the crisis in Iraq. While security conditions do not allow us to operate in Iraq, we have now running our second-largest mission in Darfur. We have currently 2,000 aid workers working for MSF which are deployed in Darfur, including 115 international staff, who are providing medical services for approximately 500,000 people all across the region of Darfur.

I was myself Head of Mission, meaning I was directing the MSF operation in the western province of Darfur, along the border with Chad. Approximately speaking, the western province extends from the border with Chad to the center of Darfur, where we have the Jebel Mara Mountains. I was there from September 2005 up to June 2006, and I keep following the situation right now as an advisor to the Sudan desk in Paris.

The Darfur crisis has been widely covered, especially in the United States—a bit less in Europe, unfortunately. This crisis has also triggered a lot of debates on the nature of the crisis—is it a genocide or not? Should we send international military forces to Darfur, with or without the consent of the Sudanese authorities? All these debates are focused around the humanitarian issues. This is why I would like to give you a view from inside this debate, which goes a little bit beyond what we consider as our legitimate sphere of competency as a humanitarian organization. I would like to address specifically three sets of questions.

First of all, are we facing in Darfur a racial war, either the planned destruction of one group of the population or a vicious ethnic cleansing campaign? This would be the first point I would like to raise. Secondly, are people dying by tens of thousands every month, as has been said sometimes by some advocacy groups? And what are the problems humanitarian organizations, specifically MSF, are facing today in Darfur?

Reading the newspaper or listening to some advocacy groups, we get the impression that Darfur is a place full of concentration camps surrounded by exterminating Arab militia in search of the last African tribes to eradicate. I must say that, after ten months in Darfur, where I traveled a lot, this representation seems to me a gross misrepresentation of the situation.

First of all, the conflict does not pit Arabs against Africans. The vast majority of Darfurians who claim Arab origins adopted a neutral stance in this conflict. They did not participate in the war. You even have nowadays some Arab groups who have joined the rebellion, and who have been exposed as a result to brutal killing by pro-governmental forces.

I don't know if you heard about the recent killing over the last weekend. There were 61 dead between Nyala and Kaas in South Darfur. Sixty-one people belonging to an Arab clan were massacred by Janjaweed because they were accused of supporting the rebellion.

On the other hand, you find among the pro-governmental forces African groups who are fighting against the rebellion. Some of the most recent brutal attacks against civilians have been perpetrated by militia who claim African origin.

Secondly, there is no hate speech in Darfur, as we had seen in Rwanda or in Bosnia or in Kosovo. You don't hear on the radio, you don't read in the newspaper, a call for the extermination of the Africans, or even for the purification of the territory of its so-called or supposedly "impure" African population. Even among the MSF staff, we have both Arabs and Africans working together, a

situation which is very different, for instance, from what I have seen in Kosovo, where it was very difficult, not to say impossible, to have Serbian and Albanian Kosovars to work together.

So I would say that the war in Darfur is better characterized as a very nasty civil war which is in the process of spiraling out of control.

As you know, this war started with an insurgency in Darfur in 2003, an insurgency which was led—part of it which was carried out by an Islamist movement, other insurgents were proclaiming their adherence to democratic principles. But both of them, the Islamists and let's say the progressive rebels, both of them were complaining against the marginalization of their region and were fighting for a bigger share of wealth and power between the center of the Sudan and its peripheral territories.

Faced with this insurrection, the government of Sudan retaliated with what we can call a massive counter-insurgency campaign targeted at the social base of the rebels, something we have seen before in the south, we have seen the east, we have seen in the oilfields. This is the way the government managed to secure the oilfields, by targeting the social base of the rebel groups who were in control of this territory.

As a result, the population called the Fur, the Massaleit, the Zaghawa, which are the communities from which the rebels drew most of their combatants, were targeted by the governmental forces, not as much as blacks or slaves or as Africans, but as terrorists, as enemies of the nation, as bandits, and as supporters of the rebellion. Because the government could not really trust its army, which comprises of a lot of Darfurians, it had to rely on local militias who were recruited thanks to the instrumentalization of local conflicts between nomads and peasants. These local militias, which we call Janjaweed, were mainly recruited from among the nomads, who are the landless people of this region of Africa, but also from African tribes as I mentioned before. These Janjaweed were assigned the duty to annihilate the social base of the rebellion.

This counter-insurgency campaign, this campaign of "scorched earth" policy, reached its height in 2003/2004. Some tens of thousands of civilians accused of supporting the rebellions because of their ethnic origin were killed during this campaign, which lasted approximately from March 2003 up to December 2004. According to 58 mortality studies which were conducted in the field by WHO, the World Health Organization, and MSF—there is an epidemiology core research center that tried to estimate the number of deaths that resulted from this campaign—they came to the figures which are quite comparable to the one you quoted, Joanne. They said that between September 2003 and June 2005 around 130,000 people died as a result of the conflict. So we can estimate now that there may be around 200,000 deaths.

But what is important to keep in mind is that among these deaths, one-quarter of the victims were slaughtered in horrendous circumstances, which have been abundantly described. The rest of the deaths are linked to disease and malnutrition. The other people died from hunger and disease while fleeing the killing, the burning of their villages, and the destruction of their livelihood. This was in 2003/2004.

What is the situation now? Although still at dramatic levels, the violence against civilians fell significantly in 2005 before rising again in the second half of 2006. According to the United Nations Mission in Sudan, called UNMIS, we recorded approximately 200 violent deaths per month since the second half of 2006, with a peak at 400 assassinations in September to November. This renewed outbreak of violence is linked to three different dynamics.

First of all, you have the resumption of fighting between the government and the rebel group who refused to sign the peace agreement that was negotiated in Abuja on May 5, 2006. This fighting

occurred mainly in the northern part of Darfur, which is a semi-desert area with a low density of population.

The number of civilian casualties linked to this conflict between the government and the opposition is far below the one of 2003 and 2004, for a very simple reason: most of this area has already been depopulated during the "scorched earth" policy of 2003 to 2004. Most of the population of North Darfur is now in the displaced persons camps. This is one of the reasons why the fighting is not causing as many deaths among civilians in northern Darfur as in 2003 to 2004.

Secondly, as you mentioned, we are faced with a splintering of the armed groups into rival factions, a splintering that affects mainly the rebels groups but also the paramilitaries. You have the rebellion, which is now split into a dozen factions; but also the paramilitary forces, the so-called Janjaweed, who become more and more autonomous and more and more keen to fight between themselves or to join the rebellion or to fight the government.

If we take the split between the rebellions, to give you an example, in October-November 2006, we had to deal with the displacement of 50,000 civilians in South Darfur, in the area of Muhajiria, 50,000 people who had to flee internecine fighting among one rebel faction. We took care of during that same period of time 100 war wounded civilians, which occurred during this fighting between the two rival rebel factions.

So there is a regime of hostility between the government and the opposition; splintering of the Arab groups; and lastly, we are faced with the multiplication of conflicts between heavily armed neighboring communities.

When I was in western Darfur during the first half of 2006, the largest number of the displaced and war wounded we had to deal with were linked to a conflict between two Arab clans. These two clans fighting each other were both Arabs, both nomads, and both supported by the government during the "scorched earth" policy of 2003-2004. This very nasty fighting, which caused more than 100 deaths in a period of two days, and which resulted in 75 war wounded which we had to treat in our hospital in Zalengei, also provoked the displacement of Arab communities.

This is something that is not very well known, but nowadays in Darfur you also have displaced Arabs, which creates a lot of tensions inside the camps, because these people were evolved in the destruction campaign of 2003-2004. They were the perpetrators of atrocities against the Fur and the Massaleit. Now they live in the same situation as their former victims.

So this is for the violent deaths.

Now, what about disease and malnutrition-related deaths these days? Approximately half of the six million inhabitants of Darfur, which means three million people, are now living in the government-controlled towns or in the displaced persons camps.

The sanitary situation in the camps is under control, in the majority of the camps at least, thanks to the massive aid deployment. As I speak, there are about 14,000 aid workers in Darfur, 12 UN agencies, 80 NGOs, which are mainly deployed in the displaced camps.

The mortality rate and the malnutrition rate in the camps are under control now. They are far below the emergency threshold, even below prewar thresholds in some of the camps, which is rather normal when you consider the magnitude of the aid assistance. Before the war, there were about 11 doctors for all of Darfur. Now for only for one section of MSF we have more than 20 doctors.

But that is not to say that the situation of the displaced is good, because, of course, if they live in camps, they are surrounded by violence. They cannot escape from the camps. That doesn't mean that the camps are fenced by barbed wire, but it is more pernicious, more vicious.

For instance, a woman who wants to go out of the camp to fetch some firewood—she may be able to come in and out safely ten times. Then the eleventh time she may come across a militia man who will either beat her, rape her, kill her, and so on.

So there is still fear, they create a climate of fear. It is not comparable to a concentration camp, but it is bad. It is a different way of keeping the people together, not allowing them to go outside.

So what is the situation in the camps? As I told you, the health situation is more or less okay, is even good. This is quite an achievement for those who remember the paralysis of the aid system in Sudan during the famine of the 1980s and the 1990s, where hundreds of thousands of people starved to death. Fortunately, this is not the case nowadays, at least in the camps.

Now, what is the situation outside of the camps? Actually, we don't have a full picture because it is very difficult to circulate outside of the camps because of insecurity. However, we know that in some places the situation is not that bad.

MSF, for instance, has an operation in the Jebel Mara, which is in the mountains, located in the center of Darfur, which is under the control of the rebel groups, one rebel group which behaves more as a civil defense group, who manage to preserve this area from attacks from the Janjaweed. So the people live more or less as they did before the war. This is a very rich area, full of orange trees. There is no food problem in this area.

The main problem is due to the sporadic attacks against the Jebel Mara, which results in war wounded. On several occasions we had to deploy mobile surgical teams to take care of the wounded. The other problem is the lack of basic services, because they are totally cut off from the rest of Darfur.

But it is a mountain. The population is spread in various valleys. So it is also difficult for us to set up an operation where we can provide assistance for all the population because they are spread out.

In the rest of the rural areas, the situation is likely to be quite bad. There is a kind of social chaos, where movements are restricted, where groups of nomads are fighting together, where sometimes they are cohabitating with farmers that have been spared by the destruction campaign. There are likely to be localized pockets of high mortality. But we face extreme difficulties to access this population because of insecurity.

As a matter of fact, attacks against humanitarian workers, as you mentioned rightly before, have dramatically increased over the past six months. These attacks against humanitarian organizations occur mainly on the roads, in the rural areas as well, but also in camps and towns, as was illustrated by the attack in Gereida.

I don't know if you are aware of it, but in December last year, a compound of five NGOs was attacked by militia. Two women were raped, one aid worker was faced with mock execution, and a dozen vehicles were looted. But still, this was the biggest attack on a town. Otherwise, the towns and camps are still manageable, I would say.

But we cannot travel on roads anymore. We have to use helicopters to go from one place to another. We are using helicopters managed by the World Food Programme, which is managing quite an outstanding operation in this area. We can also carry out routes and organize the referral of patients who need emergency surgical care by using private transporters, a private taxi driver or a truck owner, who have their own security arrangements, which means basically that they move

with armed escorts, something which we do not do because it is too dangerous. Sometimes these convoys are attacked, there is exchange of fire, you have wounded, some people killed. But anyway, we manage still to keep our operations running in the main camps, although at a higher risk of being looted, raped, or killed.

As for the rural areas, as I mentioned before, access is very difficult, because it is very difficult to know who is in control of the territory. I mean it is so much fragmented that we experience a lot of difficulties in identifying the group who is in control and who can give us security guarantees. More generally, you have a global state of insecurity, of lawlessness, which is due to this fragmentation of the armed groups, with the development of a kind of gray area, which does not fall under the territorial grip of one party or another.

But in addition to that, you also have a deliberate strategy by the government to target humanitarian workers, for two reasons. First, to remove humanitarian presence from the area of military activities—this is especially the case in North Darfur; but also the fact that the attacks, especially brutal attacks including rapes, increased after August 2006, especially after the vote on the resolution by the Security Council on the deployment of UN troops in Darfur. This increase of attacks on humanitarian workers after the vote on the resolution we clearly interpret as a strategy by the government to counter the threat of international intervention by taking humanitarian actors hostage. Basically, these attacks are a message sent to the international community which says in substance: "If you keep wanting to send in the troops, be aware that this will be at the cost of the life of humanitarian workers in Darfur."

These security problems—lawlessness, targeted attacks against aid workers—are not likely to be solved even by the deployment of the 20,000 UN troops. It is very unlikely that there will be enough to secure the roads, even less to pacify the countryside. But they might contribute to the securitization of the camps.

In any case, we have to bear in mind that to deploy the troops without the consent of the government of Sudan or without the consent of the other main belligerents in Darfur would mean basically invading western Darfur—in other words, declaring war on the Sudanese government—without any assurance that such an action would enhance civilian safety or humanitarian safety. An international intervention in Darfur presents tougher problems than in Kosovo, East Timor, and Sierra Leone. Those places were small territories held by well-identified armed groups, and the vast majority of the population living in Kosovo, East Timor, and Sierra Leone was in favor of the foreign intervention, which is not the case in Darfur.

Therefore, there is a high probability that an invasion of Western Sudan could end in a bloodbath that would not spare the civilians, like Operation Restore Hope in Somalia in 1992 or like Operation Iraqi Freedom. In addition, this kind of nonconsensual intervention would inevitably result in the collapse of the ongoing operation, an operation on which more than two million people are surviving right now, as it was the case in Kosovo, Sierra Leone, East Timor, Afghanistan, and Iraq, where the offensive coincided with the suspension of any aid operations.

So from a humanitarian point of view, at least from a relief point of view, what would help us with the civilian population I think is to push to exert some pressure on all the warring parties—so the government for sure, but also the rebels—to exert pressure so that they respect the life of the civilians or the integrity of relief agencies. But I am afraid that the bare use of force would not bring any relief in Darfur.

Finally, I would like to emphasize also what is important for the safety of humanitarian action in Darfur is to keep a clear separation of roles between the different stakeholders in Darfur. I mean relief agencies, human rights organizations, the United Nations Mission in Sudan, the government, activists—they all have different objectives and constraints.

I think humanitarian agencies must stay away from calls for peacekeeping and military action and concentrate on how best to reach and assist the people trapped by the conflict. Otherwise, they introduce a kind of confusion into the crisis whereby we are considered not only as relief workers but as being involved in the politics of intervention, as being partial, as being in favor of the war, against both parties, which is a security threat for humanitarian operations.

I think there is a lot to do in terms of humanitarian aid, but it is worth it.

Thank you very much

Questions and Answers

Question : You mentioned a civil war between the Arab Islamics and the non-Islamics. Why is there a war between the Islamics and the Islamics? What's their problem?

Fabrice Weissman: In Sudan, racism is deeply entrenched in the society. The elite of Khartoum (who belong mainly to the ethnic groups selected by the British colonial power in colonial times to rule the Sudan) consider themselves as the legitimate ruler of Sudan. This elite regards the people of the various peripheries of Sudan as second-class citizens who do not deserve to have access to political power and economic wealth. Frustrated by this racism and marginalization, a lot of Darfurians joined the Islamist parties that emerged in Sudan in the 1970's and 1980's. They believed that if Sudan would be ruled according to Islamic rule there would be equality among all believers/citizens. An Islamic society was considered as the way forward for a real equality between the various people of Sudan, for an end to racism.

But the Darfurians who joined the Islamist movement soon realized when they reached Khartoum that there were still some racism from the elite of Khartoum toward the people from the west. In mosques, as in the Islamic party or in the State after the 1989 coup (which brought the Islamists to power), people from the west and the rest of Sudanese peripheries, were given second rank positions. Therefore, a lot of Darfurian Islamists started to consider the Khartoum Islamists as being hypocrites, not respecting their commitments for equality among all believers. This is why they took arms against them in the name of a "true" Islamic project which would banish all racism between the people of Sudan.

You have to bear in mind that these people in Khartoum nowadays are closer to a very common and brutal military dictatorship than to an Islamic ideology. Since the discovery of oil in Sudan, they are more interested in business than in Islamic revolution.

Q: What is your mission there? Are you basically Médecins Sans Frontières? Are you running the hospitals there? Do you work in parallel with the UN people? How do you communicate? Please elaborate on that.

F.W: Currently our mission is to provide health services, so mainly we are providing hospital care. So we are working either in a governmental hospital or we have our own hospital structure.

Q: Field hospitals?

F.W: Yes, field hospitals in the displaced camps. These are our running activities.

In addition to that, we are trying to answer to acute emergencies, which means that when there is fighting somewhere, we try to dispatch a team to take care of the wounded and to take care of the displaced population. In such circumstances, we go beyond purely medical activities. We provide

vaccinations, we provide safe drinking water, shelter—basic items which are needed for the survival of the population.

But we are not involved in the peace process or in trying to solve the crisis. Our role is limited to assistance to the civilian population from every side.

Q: Has what is going on in Darfur affected life in Khartoum at all, increasingly over the last two or three years? Or is it as if it doesn't even happen, doesn't exist?

F.W: It is as you said. It is mostly like it doesn't exist at all. Khartoum is a kind of an island, a Middle East-style town, which is very rich. It was calculated that in the 1980's the revenue of Khartoum itself was the equivalent of the revenue of all Sudan. So it is an island of prosperity in an ocean of misery and poverty.

The people there are not very aware about what is going on in Darfur, except recently, where there was a fight inside Khartoum between some soldiers belonging to the rebel faction who signed the peace agreement in May last year. There was a fight in Khartoum between these rebels, who are now aligned with the government, and the police, which resulted in a dozen deaths. But otherwise people live their life as normal.

Q: Four years from now what will happen? That is, what natural occurrences? If this just stays as it is, what equilibrium changes something? Or does it just continue to go on like this?

F.W: It is very difficult to say. Most of the observers are very pessimistic about the future of Darfur, especially because now the crisis is extending to Chad or to Central Africa, and it is also connected to the crisis of the nomadic way of life in all the sub-Saharan regions. The kind of local conflicts for which Khartoum used to recruit its militia, these local conflicts are opposing the nomads and the farmers, whose way of life has become less and less sustainable because of the desertification process. Even though Darfur is the size of France, the valuable part of Darfur is becoming smaller and smaller. Every year the desert goes more south, more south, more south. And the population is growing.

So there is an objective problem of access to land. There are objective reasons that push the farmers and the nomads to compete for natural resources that are becoming more and more scarce. This is not only the case in Darfur; it is also the case in Chad, also the case in Niger.

But on top of that, this conflict between the rebels and the government, weapons are pouring in, and the social fabric of all this area is breaking down. So people are very pessimistic about the future of all this area.

Q: I was wondering, given the increasing lawlessness and dangers, how difficult is it for you to recruit staff to actually go in and work, and how long can they withstand the type of environment?

F.W: It is very difficult, especially because there is no qualified staff in Darfur. This is one of the reasons why the rebels took arms, because they were neglected in terms of access to education. So most of our Sudanese doctors are recruited from Khartoum. These doctors are very afraid to come to Darfur, and some of them have been victims also of violence.

We try to provide them with the same security guarantees as for the international staff. So, for the time being, we manage to overcome their initial fears to go to Darfur.

Otherwise, we have to deal also with the Darfurian staff recruited locally. Of course, they are victims of the conflict; but they are not only victims, they are also very politicized. Some of them are very in favor of the rebels.

And we have to deal quite often with incidents in which the security forces come and try to arrest some of our staff who are suspected of being spies on behalf of the rebellion. So it is difficult, but still possible.

Q: So you are saying a good percentage of the doctors come from Sudan itself?

F.W: Yes.

Q: Not from other parts of Africa, or Asia, or the United States or Europe?

F.W: Both. We have mixed teams. Usually, our doctors are more in supervision positions—for instance, in addition to hospitalization, we also have outpatient consultations, which are very numerous. We do more than 100,000 consultations per month. So we need to rely on the local doctors, on their referrals of these cases, if they don't know, to the international doctors.

Joanne Myers: You talked a little bit about that it was civilian rule, but also oil played some part in the war as well, an economic part. Could you talk about that a little bit?

F.W: About the oil, yes. There are no proven oil reserves in Darfur as such. But the oil plays a big role in the conflict because it is one of the many reasons why the government is using whatever means it has at its disposal to remain in power because it wants its grip on the oil revenues, and it gives them also the means to buy weapons and so on.

In addition, when it comes to international pressure, it is true, but it is difficult to reach a consensus among the Security Council especially, because some members of the Security Council, like China, are highly dependent on the oil supply from Sudan. The conflict is not about oil as such, even though oil plays an important role in explaining how the various parties behave.

Q: So you would label it mainly as a civilian war?

F.W: Yes.

Q: Could you talk a little bit about how the different humanitarian organizations relate to one another in Darfur? You've got a lot of different groups, and I know in previous cases there have been serious problems along that line.

F.W: Yes. It is not that much the case in Darfur, because the area is huge, the needs are huge, and there is a place for everyone. So there is a good division of roles. Thanks to the presence of other medical organizations, MSF is able to refocus its attention on, I would say, high-tech medical care, surgery and hospitalization.

We had to handle non medical activities, which we started in 2003-2004, like water supply and food distribution. All this was handed over to other organizations who are more specialized in these type of activities, which gives us more flexibility to be more responsive and reactive to acute emergencies.

On the other hand, there was a bit of conflict among the humanitarian community, but not that much actually, about what to do for the so-called Arabs, because at the beginning the conflict was depicted as a conflict between Arabs and Africans and the Arabs were seen by most of the humanitarian community as being like Nazis. So nobody was willing to engage with them.

This resulted in, first of all, some Arab victims, because you have Arab victims of the conflict—in a far more limited number, but still. This resulted in Arab victims being deprived of assistance on several occasions.

Also, this resulted in Arab leaders not being engaged while negotiating access. Because most of the NGOs—that has changed a lot now, because they realized—most of the NGOs were considering the nomads, the Arabs, as being very obedient, as being under the full control of the government. So they were thinking that it was enough to deal with the government to get security guarantees. But this is not the case, because the Arab leaders have their own agenda. If you want

to travel safely on the road, it is not enough to get a guarantee from the military or from the government; you have to see the people who are actually controlling and patrolling the roads.

Q: I am interested in knowing your opinion; is there is going to be any positive change if the African Union Mission will be replaced by the United Nations Mission?

F.W: I am not a political expert, so it is difficult for me. But, you know, what is likely to happen is that we will have the same people but they will change the color of their helmets. Of course, a better-equipped, better-supplied force could somehow improve at least the security around the camps. But we cannot expect 20,000 people to pacify a country the size of France or the size of Texas.

So yes, they could contribute to improve the situation a little bit, but it won't be the key to the crisis, especially now when everybody is a bit lost about what they should do. Their initial mandate was to implement the peace agreement that was signed in May of last year, but this peace agreement is rejected by all the rebel groups except one and by the majority of the Darfurians. So you cannot implement a peace agreement by force or by waging war.

So yes, we can hope that it will contribute to the security in the camps, because we saw some good African Union commanders, when they were meeting with communities, really made a difference locally—when they organized patrols to go with the women to collect firewood; when they would try to defuse conflicts between some rebel groups and some Arab militias; to organize a migration, for instance, of cattle along certain roads.

So yes, they can help, but it won't be the magic wand that will bring security and peace in Darfur.

Q: May I ask you a more general question about Médecins Sans Frontières? Obviously, it started in France, and I've been aware of it since the beginning. I wonder what its funding sources are these days. I get mailings all the time asking for contributions. Where does the money come from percentage-wise?

F.W: In 2006, 82 percent of our funding was coming from private funds, so from people like you who contribute to MSF.

Q: From what countries?

F.W: Nineteen countries—France, Australia, USA, Japan, and the rest a little bit.

Q: I was wondering, for instance, if the United States had grown dramatically in its participation.

F.W: Definitely yes. The participation of the American public in the funding of MSF operations has been a key to our independence. It is very recent, but we can now rely almost entirely on private funding and be totally independent of donor policy, which is a real freedom, which is key to being really impartial and to behaving independently of the political agenda.

Q: Can I just ask you to talk about the effect on Chad and Niger? Is this just a growing plague? Is it containable? Can you describe what is taking place in the adjacent countries?

F.W: First of all, you have the covert war between Chad and Sudan, because Chad was a key element in the funding of the rebellion in Sudan. As a retaliation, the Sudanese government helped some Chadian rebels to try to overthrow the Chadian regime. So you have two civil wars that are interconnected, and the fighters easily cross the border. The Chadian government is using some Sudanese rebels to protect its borders.

On the other hand, you have some Sudanese paramilitaries who are joining the Chadian rebels to fight the regime in Chad. So you have local civil wars which are interconnected through the

movement of fighters, through the implication of the various regimes, and through also the structural factors of conflicts, this fight for natural resources.

But there is an intervention going on. The French are deeply involved in this war. This is something that is not very well-known, even in France where the public doesn't care at all what its army is doing. But it is the largest military operation France has ever conducted in Africa since 1978, in Chad and in some parts of the Central African Republic. The French government is supporting the Chadian regime and the Central African Republic regime against their opponents.

Q: What were the terms of the peace agreement signed by the single rebel group and what were the objections of the other rebel groups to that agreement?

F.W: Actually, among the people who were part of the negotiating team among the African Union, they said that there were no major objections. The thing is, this agreement was forced upon the warring parties by the mediation team by using coercive means. They said, "You have to sign right now," without taking the time to discuss small details of implementation and so on. There was the idea that this is a short war so there must be a quick fix, even though this war is also the result of a long-term crisis. So there was this hurry to reach an agreement by the African Union, by the European Union, by the American diplomacy, which was very convincing because it was said that they even threatened one of the guys who refused to sign with death. The one who signed the agreement was threatened into signing the agreement.

So it has more to do with the way the negotiation was conducted than with the contents itself of the agreement. Also there are some small points of this agreement which are negotiable as long as you take time to reach a consensus. This is why everybody was also a bit upset among the international community, because it appeared to everyone as a good compromise.

Q: What do you think the consensus should be or could be?

F.W: according to observers, the one which is in the agreement is a good one. You have some specific parts, especially for the compensation of the war victims. There is a fund of \$30 million which is supposed to be allocated to the war victims, to the displaced, which means for the two million displaced something like \$15 per person. This was not enough for some of the rebel leaders. But this is something which is negotiable.

Joanne Myers: We'll take two questions, short ones, and then we are going to adjourn and continue the conversation.

Q: Mine is very short. Do you happen to read Nicholas Kristof in *The New York Times*? Has he accurately portrayed the situation?

F.W: I don't think so. Yes and no. Yes, the violence he is describing is real—maybe not to that extent. Nowadays we are not seeing the same level of violence as in 2003-2004. On the other hand, his way of analyzing the violence in terms of a genocide is for me wrong.

Q: Do you need a visa to go there? Do you get support from the Sudanese government?

F.W: Yes.

Q: How do you work with CARE, with UNICEF, with the Quakers? Does everybody do his own thing? How do you communicate? Do you have to speak Arabic or do you speak French, things like that? What's the situation?

F.W: All of our operations are going through Khartoum.

Q: Are they supporting you?

F.W: There is a fast-track process for issuing visas and travel permits, which is better than the normal procedure to operate in northern Sudan. It still takes time to get a travel permit, but we manage. I mean it takes two weeks to get a visa nowadays, and between three and four days to get a travel permit.

As you mentioned, the United Nations representative has been able to negotiate even a better deal now concerning the conditions under which we are allowed to operate, in terms of who we are allowed to hire. Theoretically, we are not entitled to hire who we want. In practice, we do it. But they can at any time, at any moment, accuse us of breaking the law and impede our activities. Now it has become officialized that we are entitled to hire who we want.

To answer your question, yes we have coordination meetings with OCHA, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, meetings in which all the agencies are represented—UN agencies, NGOs. We exchange information. We have common activities on things which are of common interest, especially an issue like visas, travel permits, working permits, and so on.

Joanne Myers : Fabrice, thank you so much.