

#10

UNION VIEW

ITUC International Trade Union Confederation
June 2008



→ Jacky Delorme



Chad: Peace heads the list of union demands

Worn down by war, corruption and the absence of democracy, Chad still belongs to that unenviable circle of the world's ten poorest countries. The oil revenue that has been pouring in since 2004 has brought no benefits for the vast majority of the population, as the repeated strikes of recent years have shown. While the authorities seek to weaken the unions by any means they can, Chad's workers' organisations are strongly urging dialogue at every level. They argue that progress cannot be made on the social front without lasting peace, and vice-versa.

Union View reports.

Peace on the trade union agenda

A peace accord in October 2007, renewed rebel attacks culminating in the offensive on N'Djamena in February 2008, the state of emergency, the hunting down of opponents, then in April a new government for "openness"... Through Chad's troubled waters, the trade unions are steering a steady course.

"Peace for decent work", "Justice for lasting peace". The Free Workers' Confederation of Chad (CLTT) and the Union of Chadian Trade Unions (UST), the two national centres affiliated to the ITUC who also share premises at the Bourse de Travail have put trade union pluralism into practice. It has not always been easy, but the banners displayed during the May Day celebrations left no doubt that the whole trade union movement shares one overriding priority: peace.

Peace in the country, at work, in schools, in the home. The personal accounts of activists tell a tale of violence: the war, of course, in central N'Djamena, last February (*), latent insecurity, clashes between arable and livestock farmers, between rival ethnic groups, road blocks, belligerent soldiers, police officers demanding ransoms, mechanical diggers flattening whole neighbourhoods of the capital, and also of beatings by a husband, or by an "auntie" against her little maid, bullying by the boss, dismissal or arbitrary transfers, a bleak future for the children, illiteracy, and the appalling injustice of low pay and poverty in retirement.

"Conflict is the modus operandi here" says Michel Barka, the president of the UST, who, as the trade union representative on the College for the Monitoring and Surveillance of Oil Earnings, has tried to help make the management of this financial windfall less opaque, but who also knows better than anyone the extent to which this money has been used to finance the war rather than the country's development. Speaking from abroad, where he had to take refuge in February, at the same time as most other civil society leaders, Djibrine Assali Hamdallah, the General Secretary of the UST says: "The war came from the east, from Sudan. But the underlying causes are internal. Our country has been caught up in a cycle of violence for 40 years. Why is peaceful political change through the ballot box impossible in Chad? In 1993 we were closely involved in the National Sovereign Conference. We had achieved tangible results. But the President has violated every democratic commitment. We won't achieve anything as long as the country is ruled along tribal, autocratic lines.

There has been no lack of trade union initiatives over recent years. Since 2000, FM Liberté, a radio station created by the UST and several human rights organisations, has broadcast a programme to advocate peace and democracy. It has a big audience in N'Djamana, at least when the station isn't shut down by the authorities who take exception to the independent tone of its presenters and journalists. In 2001, the trade unions mobilised their members in the run up to the presidential elections. "We carried out a massive civic campaign with the trade unions" recalls Baldal Oyamta, the General Secretary of the Chadian Human Rights League (LTDH). "We criss-crossed the country to ensure that the population



understood the importance of the elections. A structure was set up: the Independent National Observatory to Monitor the Electoral Process and Democracy (ONIPED) led by Djibrine Assali of the UST. We trained observers who were sent to the polling stations. But we failed, the elections were rigged, as the damning report we issued at the time shows".

The trade unions did not let this discourage them. When the development of the oil fields in the south of the country received the assistance of the World Bank, things looked promising. Trade unionists gradually developed into hardened negotiators thanks to trade union training made possible through external support. Brahim Ben Saïd, General Secretary of the CLTT: "The independence struggle, when the trade unions came out onto the streets to fight for freedom, is ancient history. Today, we don't need hot heads, we need responsible people. Dialogue is the only way we can achieve peace. It isn't easy and the authorities aren't doing much to help, but we have to negotiate again and again. We must understand that we cannot get everything at once, that there has to be compromise." It was through dialogue, legal mechanisms and the mobilisation of the whole trade union movement that Ben Saïd was reinstated in his job, after being unfairly dismissed in 2006. Other trade union leaders such as Djibrine or Khager from the UST have not been so lucky.

Dialogue is also at the heart of the work of the Call for Peace and Reconciliation Monitoring Committee (CSAPR) which brings together all civil society organisations, including the CLTT, UST and several other independent trade unions. Created in 2002, the CSAPR has been extremely dynamic, consolidating a network of activist associations and often managing to bring them together with representatives of the government, national institutions, diplomatic representations in Chad, international human rights organisations, etc. Unfortunately, the CSAPR's activities have been on hold since the February events. Their premises have been ransacked

and several members have received death threats.

"In a country where life expectancy is only 47 years for women and 46 for men, conflict is scandalous. It takes months to build a solid house, yet only seconds to destroy it. The war is ruining our homes, our crops, our factories, and even our consciousness" said Abdi Abderaman Haggat, a university professor, speaking at the Conference for Peace organised on 30 April 2008 by the CLTT. That conference even gave rise to some – rather heated - exchanges between grass roots activists, students and the Chadian employers' leader, Mahamat Adoum Ismael, director of the Chad Sugar Company (CST). "It's a first" said Ben Saïd. "The employers had never agreed to take part in such a meeting before".

New initiatives for democracy in Chad are constantly emerging. Baldal Oyamta (LTDH) says "We have just restarted a project in May, in the Batha region, which had been stopped because of the war. Traditional and religious leaders, local authorities and of course trade unionists are meeting and working together to try to set in place conflict resolution strategies at the local level. We are beginning in Ati, the regional capital, but awareness raising groups will then be set up in all the departments and sub-prefectorates of the region. We have also begun activities with teachers' unions to counter violence in schools. Seminars have already taken place, but we want to go further and set in place conflict resolution groups in schools. We'll do the same thing in the south, in the oil fields. Throughout the country, we are counting on the mobilising power of the unions."

(*) A rebel attack from Sudan provoked fierce fighting on 2 and 3 February in N'Djamena. More than 200 people were killed.



Victorine Denewege, employee and CLTT activist

"Since my husband left me, I have lived alone with my two children and the four orphans I take care of. During the war in February, we fled N'Djamena. We camped out for several days underneath a tree about 70 kilometres from here. It was unbearable. I decided to go back. Our neighbourhood, known as the Leprosy zone, was used by the rebels as a base until just before their final attack. When their offensive failed, and they were in retreat, and were being chased down by the national army, the soldiers turned on us. They accused us of supporting the rebels. Women in the neighbourhood were being raped. I was terrified. I asked my two grown up daughters to hide themselves. I emptied a bottle of iodine on a leg wound I got when we left and I wrapped it in bandages to discourage any ill intentions the soldiers may have had. When they appeared in the courtyard of my compound, they yelled "How many rebels are you hiding here?" They demanded that I give them 5000 CFA on the grounds that not all the occupants were home. I only had 2000 CFA left. Without the money that a neighbour lent me, I don't know what would have become of me. My children have been traumatised ever since. It doesn't matter how much I tell them the war is over, they still refuse to leave the house and go to school. That upsets me.



You want me to talk about my work? I don't know what the problem is. Either I am not able to make myself understood by my superiors, or they are not taking me seriously because I am a woman. I am only a switchboard operator at Star Nationale, an insurance company, even though I have done four years higher education after my baccalauréat and I've got a masters degree. I have bettered myself by running a small business. I wanted to survive, to earn a bit more to give my children a future. Look at my salary slip for April: I earned 31,988 CFA and worked 30 hours! When I question my male colleagues, they tell me I shouldn't complain, because if I continue, I risk being transferred, as another colleague was recently. It's not normal. I'm 40. How much longer have I got to live? I don't know how to negotiate for these things, for myself and for others. That is why I have started going to the CLTT women's meetings."

The workers' forum

At the end of May, FM-Liberté, the radio station supported by the UST, was finally given permission to broadcast again, after being closed for four months.

I am the presenter of "The workers' forum" every Thursday from 18h30 to 19h00. The programme deals with a wide range of subjects: collective bargaining, dispute resolution, gender issues, etc. Essentially, the programme teaches workers about their rights and responsibilities. In 2007, during the strike, we invited trade unionists on air so that listeners could have a better understanding of what their demands were. When national trade union seminars are held in N'Djamena, we take our microphones to the regional delegates to ask them to explain what trade union life is like far away from the capital. After each programme, I get encouragement and advice from other radio journalists. The following day ordinary citizens ask our permission to copy the programmes. Everyone thinks the programme is too short. These reactions are extremely gratifying. Frankly I am very pleased about what we do on FM-Liberté...what we have achieved."

Bursting with enthusiasm as he talks about his few months as a presenter on FM-Liberté, Guernanbaye Djasrangar had almost forgotten about the closure of the radio station on 16 January and the decision of the Chadian authorities to put an end to a citizens' initiative: the creation in 2000 by the UST and six human rights organisations of a radio station promoting democracy in a country that had long been in the grip of severe dictatorship. Together with fellow journalists and trade unionists (Guernanbaye is also responsible for workers' training and the communications department at the UST) he found himself reduced to waiting for a change of heart by the authorities who, after years of relative tolerance of the independent press, decided in the last few months that they would no longer tolerate the slightest criticism. Kaoutar Lazare Djekourninga, the director of FM-Liberté, recalls the closure of the radio station: "We had broadcast a press release from the Consumers Defence Association which exposed the corruption of some civil servants. An identity card officially costs 4000 CFA, but Chadians often have to pay double that to get one. We wanted to use this information to warn the people and to draw the government's attention to the problem."

On 16 January, after a police raid, FM-Liberté was closed down and its director arrested "for broadcasting false news". On 21 January, after two days in prison, Lazare appeared in court where the charges were dismissed. "As the station had still not been given permission to resume broadcasting, it was our turn to take the matter to court. The verdict is due on 8 May." (1)

The worst was yet to come however, for all of Chad's independent press. The rebel attack on N'Djamena on 2 and 3 February finally gave the authorities their opportunity to muzzle journalists. A few months earlier, the government had tried to change the law on the press in parliament, but in vain. Then two days after the state of emergency declared



In March 2008, FM-Liberté and five independent newspapers defied the authorities and published "The Newspapers' Newspaper". A one-off 12-page publication, with a print-run of 10,000. It passionately set out the case for freedom of the press in Chad.

on 18 February, President Idriss Deby signed an order imposing new regulations on the press. In addition to the need to obtain government permission (a form of advance censorship) the text introduced new press offences. "Collaboration with the enemy", "undermining State security", "insulting the Head of State", and any texts that encouraged "tribal, racial or religious hatred" are subject to heavy prison terms. Given that the government is even more tribal than ever (2), and that the divisions between the north and south of the country and between Muslims and Christians are the traditional fault lines in Chadian society, the anger of the free press can be easily understood. "We can't do our job, it is as simple as that" says Lazare. "Take the example of the army, which commits appalling human rights abuses. Under this government order, if we denounce these abuses, we would be undermining State institutions. And we cannot talk about the rebels anymore without being suspected of sharing intelligence with the enemy."

The battle waged by the government over the last few months is unevenly matched. Despite the good will and bravery of its journalists, the independent press has little means to influence society. Its resources are ridiculously small. FM-Liberté found its audience shrunk sharply after lightning damaged its equipment. The written press meanwhile suffers directly from the illiteracy of much of the population. Print runs have been greatly reduced and newspapers are almost impossible to find outside of N'Djamena. It was a brave decision by FM-Liberté and five independent newspapers (N'djamena bi-hebdo, Le Miroir, L'observateur, Le temps, Notre temps) when they defied the authorities and published "The Newspapers' Newspaper" in March 2008, a one-off 12-page publication, with a print-run of 10,000. With the financial support of Reporters without Borders, it passionately set out the case for freedom of the press in Chad. The Chadian authorities finally reopened FM-Liberté at the end of May.

(1) On 8 May the court declared it had no jurisdiction to try the case. The radio station was able to broadcast again at the end of May, however.

(2) The Zaghawa, President Idriss Deby's tribe, only represent between 2 and 5% of the population, but since he has been in power they have been over-represented in decision-making posts.



The programme teaches workers about their rights and responsibilities



Guernanbaye Djasrangar, presenter of FM-Liberté

Trade union rights: widespread repression

There are endless violations of trade union rights in Chad. Injustice is rife all the way to the offices of the Ministry ofJustice. The trade union rights violations described below all took place in 2007.

“Last year, the ministry threatened that any worker taking part in the strike would be penalised. And it kept its word: of the 100 law clerks affiliated to the union, 23 were penalised. Some were transferred, others were removed from their posts. That is what happened to me” adds Andakeizou Vadandy, President of the National Clerks Union of Chad. “But that dates back to July 2006. I was punished for my participation in a previous UST strike”.

Since then Andakeizou is no longer head clerk and no longer has an office. But he continues to go to work because he is still paid a salary. All the members of the executive bureau have been penalised. But what has been the result? The union keeps going, come what may, and so does the Ministry. “It is absurd and counter-productive” says Andakeizou. These sanctions have paralysed the courts for months. They have replaced us with people who don’t have the necessary experience. I suppose that for them it was just a means of breaking the strike and dividing us.”

Andakeizou and two colleagues run the UST’s “industrial disputes, bargaining and legal affairs” department. In 2007 they had to give up systematically recording all the violations of trade union rights reported to them. Anti-union repression had become so commonplace they couldn’t keep up. According to the former chief clerk, all civil service employees have faced intimidation, and there have been countless sanctions. “The private sector hasn’t been spared either. Workers in several companies stopped work in solidarity with the strikers. In Moundou, workers were dismissed in the oil industry. The Civil Service and Labour Ministry had to intervene to get them reinstated. It is about the only positive

thing it has done.”

During the 2007 strike, the Minister refused to negotiate with the cross-union grouping, the Intersyndicale, then issued an order to dissolve it. She also decided to snub the UST by no longer recognising it as the most representative workers’ organisation. As Andakeizou explains “The criteria is set out by law and the UST meets all the requirements. It is by far the biggest national centre in the country, but henceforward the UST has the same status in tri-partite bodies as the independent unions or the CST, a moribund organisation that the government unearthed last year to undermine the strike. Our General Secretary, Djibrine Assali, had his passport withdrawn last year to stop him taking part in the International Labour Conference in Geneva.

On 5 June, the trade union headquarters were raided by the security forces, preventing strikers from entering. But the greatest act of aggression by far in 2007 was the government’s decision to introduce Law No.8 regulating public service strikes, adopted in the course of the strike itself. Both the UST and the CLTT denounced the text which did not take into account any of the amendments tabled by the trade unions during the discussion in parliamentary committee. “The aim is to totally undermine the right to strike” says Andakeizou. The Law provides for the creation of a Conciliation Council whose composition is decided by the government. This new procedure considerably prolongs the time before a strike can take place. But worst of all is the extension of the definition of “essential services”. Judging by the text of this law, absolutely anyone could be requisitioned by the authorities.”



The aim of the Law N°8 is to totally undermine the right to strike”



Andakeizou Vadandy,
UST



Youssouf, day labourer at the N’Djamena factory of the Chad Sugar Company (CST)

“We are paid by the tonne. Our pay varies according to the number of lorries to be loaded or unloaded. The bags weigh 50 kilos, it’s very difficult. We can earn a maximum of 1,500 to 2,000 CFA per day. Sometimes we get nothing, because it isn’t the season. If there is an accident, we get first aid but anything else we have to pay for ourselves. The situation hasn’t changed. Sometimes they dangle the promise of a permanent job before us. When we believe there is a possibility of being hired, we come with our letters of application, but then we are told there aren’t any jobs going. Then, a few days later, we see new people arriving. The recruiting process is based on who you know: “Boss, hire my brother!” Everything works like

that. Some of us have been here for 30years. We are going to die without ever having had a proper job. How can we feed our families on 1,000 CFA? We have a glass of tea with sugar in the morning, and work on empty stomachs. On public holidays, the factory management gives us two sugar loaves and two packets of sweets. “



Oil: a blessing or a curse?

Four years after they began drilling for oil in Chad, the impact on development has yet to make itself felt.

The pipeline that links the oil fields of Doba in Chad to the port of Kribi in Cameroon was finished one year early (in 2003), the oil is flowing, and so is the money. With the steep rises in oil prices, the State's income is rising steadily. Is it a godsend for Chad? The "resource curse", also known as "the paradox of plenty", referring to the proven fact that countries rich in natural resources have a lower standard of living, a slower rate of growth and are more susceptible to being torn apart by conflict than others – could well apply to Chad despite all the good intentions declared when the project was launched.

As far as the World Bank was concerned, this was supposed to be a model of good governance, of sustainable development and of the redistribution of the oil income. In short, it was to be the opposite of what happened in Nigeria, Angola, etc. Approached in the nineties by the oil industry, the World Bank agreed to support the project on condition that oil earnings were used to improve the living conditions of the people of Chad (1).

The reality is very different. In 2004, three quarters of the petrodollars were officially used for road construction. The public contracts led to every kind of misappropriation. The oil bonanza evaporated like snow in the sun. "From 2004 to 2007, direct earnings from oil were used to build schools, health centres, water towers and roads. But much of this infrastructure doesn't work because of a lack of staff, of materials, of medicines, etc." confirms Michel Barka, the President of the UST and the former general rapporteur of the College for the Monitoring and Surveillance of Oil Earnings. The trade union representative has exposed the way the money from indirect earnings has been used: "Taxes and various other levies amount to ten or 20 times more than direct earnings and we cannot exert any control over those. That is where the money is! That is the money that the authorities are shamelessly availing themselves of. No-one is fooled. The money has been used mainly to pay the army and to buy tanks and helicopters.

In 2006, the Chadian authorities amended the Petroleum Act, despite criticism from the World Bank that saw it as a violation of the initial agreements. The principal changes concerned the cancellation of the fund for future generations

and the inclusion of national security in the list of priority sectors. The last international audit (1) reveals under-expenditure in the priority sectors and prohibitive costs relating to the building of schools and health institutions. These findings are confirmed by the College for the Monitoring and Surveillance of Oil Earnings which notes a net fall in the 2007 budgets for education, social expenditure and agriculture, as well as in the amounts earmarked for the operating costs of ministries rather than investment.

At the beginning of 2008, when the scope and supervisory powers of the College should have been strengthened, its composition was radically altered. Michel Barka of the UST and the two other members representing civil society were replaced by people the government considered more amenable.

After four years of production, the results have been disappointing. In the oil fields the "rigorous social and environmental policies" that should have been implemented have turned into a fiasco according to not only the unions and NGOs, but also independent observers and consultants. "Corruption is at a height in the drilling fields. The members of the commission who are supposed to manage these funds have just been replaced for a second time" says Michel Barka. Baldal Oymka, General Secretary of the Chadian Human Rights League (LTDH) adds: "Peasant farmers can no longer cultivate sorghum and millet and their mango trees have stopped bearing fruit. There has been a sharp rise in pulmonary and infectious diseases and dispensaries don't work as well as before". The project has been no more beneficial to the population at the national level. The government's cynicism extends to justifying its refusal to meet trade union demands (salaries, the minimum wage, pensions, etc.) by citing the budgetary orthodoxy advocated by the international financial institutions. The mismanagement of oil earnings is all the more deplorable given that Chad is not Kuwait. The land-locked oil fields, far from any access to the sea, are still proving a costly exercise (maintenance of the pipeline, transit tax etc.), the crude is of mediocre quality and reserves are limited. Figures illustrate the situation.

(1) The project is also binding on Cameroon which has more than 1000 kilometers of pipeline running through it.

(2) Report of the International Advisory Group's mission at the end of 2007 (www.gic-iaq.org).



No-one is fooled. The money has been used mainly to pay the army and to buy tanks and helicopters



Michel Barka, President of the UST and the former general rapporteur of the College for the Monitoring and Surveillance of Oil Earnings. (Read the full interview at: <http://www.ituc-csi.org/spip.php?article2250&lang=en>)

Social dialogue deadlocked in the oil industry

PETROSYNAT's activities are clearly not welcome as far as Esso-Tchad (1) and other companies in the oil region are concerned.

"Dear General Secretary of the UST, with regard to your request to visit, we wish to inform you that the report that the ITUC is preparing is in our view a matter that primarily concerns workers affiliated to the UST. It would appear that, further to consultations, staff representatives in the oil industry in Komé are not aware of this project or of this proposed visit. Consequently, we regret to inform you that we cannot at this stage give a favourable response to your request. Yours sincerely..." The letter from Stéphane de Mahieu, General Director of Esso Exploration & Production Chad Inc. infuriates Bela Lobe, staff representative at Esso-Chad. "It's a lie. The General Director did not consult us. We were told about the report, and we are very disappointed

that we could not talk to you on the spot. After that refusal, we tried to get another meeting with him to persuade him to agree. But we couldn't. The UST has even referred the matter to the Oil Minister. In vain. It proves that journalists and trade unionists are not welcome in the oil zone. Nothing is acceptable here!"

Since the beginning of the year, Esso-Chad workers' delegates have been negotiating a collective agreement with management, but the representatives of the 470 employees, almost all of whom are affiliated to the PETROSYNAT, the oil industry's trade union federation (UST), are tired of the management's tactical manoeuvres to make the negotiations fail. "Meetings are often suspended or cancelled. When

Corruption

Transparency International ranks Chad as one of the ten countries where corruption is the most obvious (172 out of 179 in 2007). In Africa, only Sudan and Somalia have a lower ranking. The NGO also brought out another set of figures in April 2008, on the 42 biggest oil companies and the transparency of their management. ExxonMobil ranks as one of the least transparent along with Lukoil (Russia) and Cnooc (China).

we do meet, we encounter obstacles on every single point. To start with we left the more contentious issues to one side and moved on, but as they don't want to meet any of our demands, we aren't making any progress. If they don't show some good will soon, a strike will be unavoidable." says Ousmane Mamadou, the union delegate at the Esso head office in N'Djamena.

Relations with Esso-Chad employees and more broadly all employers in the oil industry have never been good. In 2006 and 2007, low pay and poor safety standards led to three strikes. Demands in 2008 are still centred on wages. It is true that 200,000 CFA isn't a bad wage for an unskilled labourer, compared to the minimum wage of 28,000 CFA. But the cost of living in Chad is high, particularly in the oil region which continues to attract men searching for work, while the number of jobs in the industry is falling steadily. There were 4,000 to 5,000 jobs during the construction of the pipeline and installations, and less than 1,500 today, including several hundred foreign workers whose privileged status rankles with local workers.

"We live on two different planets, even though we often do the same jobs as them" says Bela Lobe. Several of our members are highly qualified, they are in decision-making posts, which they share with expatriates (2). They are just as qualified and competent as the others, but they earn 15 or 20 times less, without even taking into account the very high allowances paid to expatriates on the grounds that Chad is

an expensive and high-risk country! We know of course that it is pointless to fight against this kind of inequality. Even if the law says "Equal pay for work of equal value" we've got no chance. But we want management at least to raise pay and our allowances to the level of our Cameroonian colleagues who are earning more than twice as much as us".

The hundreds of workers employed by sub-contractors are no better off. Trade union organising is also more complicated among these workers, says Alphé Mbaimguen, President of PETROSYNAT. "We have about 300 members employed by the sub-contractors, out of a total of 750, but they don't all pay their dues. The highly secure nature of the oil fields not only makes life difficult for workers who have to stay enclosed in these enclaves for weeks before going on leave, it also prevents us from carrying out our trade union activities. Our executive bureau isn't working well. And management doesn't make things any easier. Safety standards are used as an excuse to prevent delegates from the different sites and companies meeting in each others' offices. It is very restrictive, it means we have to work by telephone or meet outside the zone. It is a violation of trade union rights. Add to that the lack of a trade union culture among the workers – the oil industry is still new to Chad – and you have some idea of the difficulties we face."

(1) Esso-Chad is part of the ExxonMobil group
(2) According to trade unionists, the legal provision stipulating that expatriate's employment contracts should not exceed two years is largely ignored, as is the requirement that the private enterprises who employ should also hire and train an equivalent number of Chadians so that in time they can hold the same skilled and decision-making posts.

Louise Ndougoumbakasse, civil servant in the Ministry of Animal Husbandry and General Secretary of the UST Women's Committee

"Illiteracy is a scourge in this country, particularly for women. Ninety per cent of them cannot read or write. With no education, they find themselves in the informal economy because they realise they have to be financially independent. The cost of living is such that their husbands cannot meet their families' needs alone. They reluctantly admit that it is often the women who enable them to make it to the end of the month, and finance their children's education. As for the few women



who have diplomas, their troubles are not over yet. At the Ministry of Animal Husbandry, where I work, the first women were hired in 1993 as technical agents, i.e. at the very bottom of the scale. They had the courage to go back to school to improve themselves and they became livestock monitors, but none of them are in decision-making positions yet, while young male trainees can quickly be promoted to these more rewarding jobs. We formed the women's committee (within the National Union of Civil Servants of the Ministry of Animal Husbandry– SYNAME) and we are fighting for parity. When we look at the situation today we find that out of 300 decision-making posts in our ministry, there are only 20 women, and out of the 20 top civil servants, there are only three women, all in deputy posts. It is clear to us in the UST Women's Committee that we have to promote girls' education. That is why, with our low wages, we are trying to start up positive discrimination measures. We can do it in our own neighbourhoods for example by sponsoring a local girl, giving the mother the small amount of money they need to enable them to send her to school. We'd appreciate it if you could spread the word among women trade unionists in the North about our urgent need for advice, training and assistance. Women are in the majority in the country (52% of the population) yet we are still marginalised in society."

Workers' education as a force for peace

The Chadian coordinating body of PANAF wants to campaign for the prevention, management and resolution of conflicts.

N'Djamena, 11 and 12 December 2007. A few weeks after the last peace agreement, as the fighting resumed in eastern Chad, a forerunner of the fierce battles in the capital on 2 and 3 February 2008, UST trade union leaders gather together to examine the role trade unions can play in the prevention, management and resolution of conflicts. At the end of their discussions the trade unionists decide to mobilise around their overriding priority: the quest for peace. The Chadian trade union movement has already made a very important contribution to peace initiatives. The workshop participants realised however that they had a very valuable tool for raising awareness among workers throughout the country: PANAF

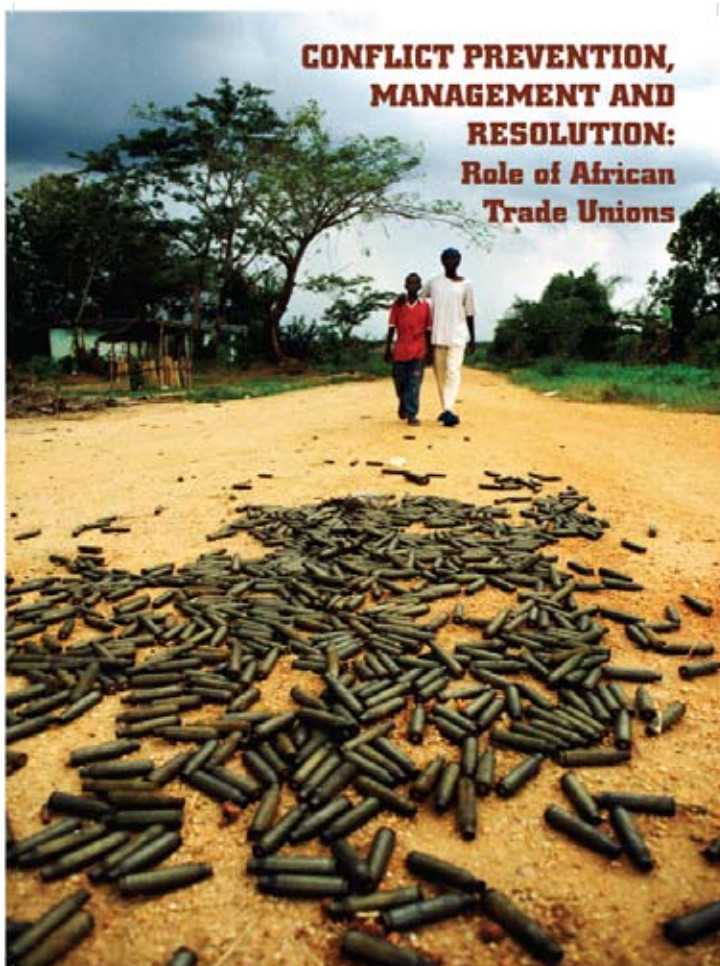
The Pan-African workers' education programme is based on study circles, a tried and tested method of discussion and training run along democratic lines. Small groups of people meet repeatedly to work together. The participants learn from the experience of others, and contribute to social change through mobilisation and through their action within the groups that they have voluntarily created on the basis of shared values and interests. Widely used in Sweden, this training method is well suited to trade unions and has the further advantage of being economical, as it relies above all on the experience of the participants, the skills of the circle leader and the quality of the educational materials. Thanks

to the experience and financial support of the Swedish trade unions, through their international secretariat the LO-TCO, PANAF study circles have trained over 1.5 million African workers. It does not only provide basic workers' education. More specialised training for union officials or on specific themes such as HIV/Aids has also proved successful. Among the 15 countries currently covered by the project, Chad has had some outstanding results.

"This project enabled us to gain entry in the oil sector" says Michel Barka, the UST President. The government, ESSO, and the sub-contractors didn't want any unions. With the support of the PANAF we were able to carry out our first mission to the oil fields and rally a handful of workers to the trade union cause. We did it, we trained them. And they created their own study circles in turn. A little while later they told us that all the workers had joined the UST! Khager, one of our leaders, has been out to see them to organise the election of workers' delegates. This has made us stronger at the national level. We are now a key player in every stage of the negotiations between the government and the World Bank."

"In 2008 we want to concentrate the bulk of our activity on conflict resolution. The resumption of the war and the insecurity have delayed the start of our activities by several months" explains Bakou Rakis Singa, PANAF's national coordinator. One essential part of the UST's work will be to resume social dialogue with the government while at the same time putting pressure on it to include the trade union movement and more broadly civil society in all policies aimed at bringing lasting peace. "It's an ambitious programme. We still don't have the funds to carry out all the activities" adds Rakis.

Study circles are an affordable solution, but the Chadian trade unions dire lack of money is matched by the logistical problems trainers encounter in such a vast country. In 2007, PANAF's two national coordinators encountered enormous difficulties in carrying out their work. Despite the bumpy roads, torrential rain and road blocks, however, they travelled over 3,000 kilometres in August to keep the programme going and organise training and retraining seminars in Mayo, Mongo and Abéché. In the second half of 2007 alone, the project enabled 225 study circles to take place. But there is a desperate shortage of money for printing training manuals. The problem arose again this year over the PANAF document on conflict aimed at providing information accessible to union members. Organising study circles in N'Djamena poses fewer problems. As health worker and union activist Guernanbaye Djasrangar explains, "I run study circles for members working in the city's main hospital. The training cycle is made up of 11 meetings, and there are three left to do. At each session, we deal with a particular subject: what trade unions are for, union finances, union cooperatives, disputes, etc. We start from the beginning, we really have to teach them the basics. But it is really good to see them taking part in these meetings without complaining despite all the difficulties. It is a shame that often we don't even have enough to offer them a hot drink."



PANAF study circles have trained over 1.5 million African workers.

The Bus Station Technician's Association: trade union organising is their only tool

For the last few years the CLTT has been expanding its activities in the informal economy. In N'Djamena, for example, Younous Mahamat Saht, the general secretary of the Bus Station Technicians' Association (ATGR) leads a small army of 525 mechanics. He may not like the warlike reference, however. Following the rebel attack in February, looters took 25 electrical generating sets, numerous welding sets and anything they considered of value. In the meantime, until some money comes in, the workers are showing great ingenuity in building and assembling by hand whenever possible. The few pieces of electrical equipment that escaped the looting are passed from one team to the next. They make the most of the time the electricity grid is working, even if it means giving up one of the rare rest breaks the workers allow themselves. Gutted vans and buses lay scattered across a piece of wasteland. To the layperson's eye, it is not clear if they are there to be used for their spare parts or if they are awaiting a new lease of life.

A little further on, a shelter made of sheet metal and raffia, kitted out with a table and bench, serves as the ATGR's headquarters. One of the members explains in Arabic that he is pleased he joined the union because it is the first time in his life he has had any training. His only education had been his time at the Koranic school as a child. Here

he is being taught his rights and responsibilities. Now he can better understand the advantages of collective action. Younous confirms that training is vital: "We need trade union and vocational training. Our children go to school, but only for two or three years. They need technical qualifications. We would like to create a learning centre for our own children and for street children. In the meantime, the children help us, it's true. They are learning on the job. It's better than just hanging around the neighbourhood, at the risk of being enrolled in the army or a rebel gang."

Not far away, dozens of tinsmiths are working hard at turning bits of sharp-edged scrap metal into wheelbarrows, buckets and all sorts of utensils. Their tools are pathetic. And so are their earnings. Busily hammering out a bowl, Léon explains that in addition to his membership dues to the union, he pays 100 CFA into the mutual health insurance association. The mutual association, launched in 2004 with the support of the NGO "Solidarité mondiale" (1) makes up for the total lack of health cover for these workers. The CLTT hopes to set up mutual associations for all its member organisations in the informal economy.

Solidarité mondiale (Worldwide solidarity), a Belgian NGO close to the Christian Confederation of Trade Unions (CSC, Belgium)



Younous Mahamat Saht, general secretary of the Bus Station Technicians' Association (ATGR).



Apprentice mechanics at work at the transport depot, N'djamena.

The informal economy: initiatives worthy of more support

The women fish mongers union and the UST are looking for ways of improving the distribution chain.

A day at the end of April in N'Djamena. It is eight o'clock in the morning and the countdown has begun for the fishmongers in Dembé market. It looks as though it's going to be another scorching day, like the previous day when temperatures reached 45°C in the shade. "We have to sell quickly now!" explains Rachel, looking worriedly at the play of light and shadows across her merchandise. An imperceptible breeze shakes the sparse leaves of the trees where the women have set up their stalls. It's not enough to cool things down, but it is enough to send a dangerous coating of sand and dust across the fish.

A crowd has gathered around one of the last vehicles to arrive from Lake Chad. In just a few minutes, its load of fish is sold in a hail of bad language. Bent under the weight of a basin, with a baby on her back, a young woman goes back to her stall after meticulously checking her change. When it comes to selling, anything goes. Some set off immediately on taxi-motorcycle taxis to sell in the most disadvantaged areas, the bravest take their wares to the side of the main road, in the full glare of the sun. The fish scales gleam. The women call out to passers-by.

"Competition is fierce" sighs Rachel. Together with her colleagues in the Women Fishmongers' Union (SYFEVEP) Rachel, their General Secretary, has been trying to channel the courage and energy of hundreds of women, with mixed results. On the positive side, by forming a union in 2002 they gained the support of the UST and the power to protest against the administrative hurdles they face, not all completely legal. "Shortly after the creation of the union, several of its members were thrown in prison because they protested at the tax they had to pay for their pitch on the market. The UST rallied to their cause and the women won their case" recalls Zara Mianande, a member of the UST Executive Bureau and Women's Committee recalls. The UST also organised a business management training workshop, mainly for their benefit, teaching them about book keeping and the basic principles of purchase price, cost price and sale price. Members were also granted micro-credit.

The UST's meagre resources did not stretch to any further training, and SYFEVEP members still face enormous problems. "The suppliers don't like us very much. Nor do the au-



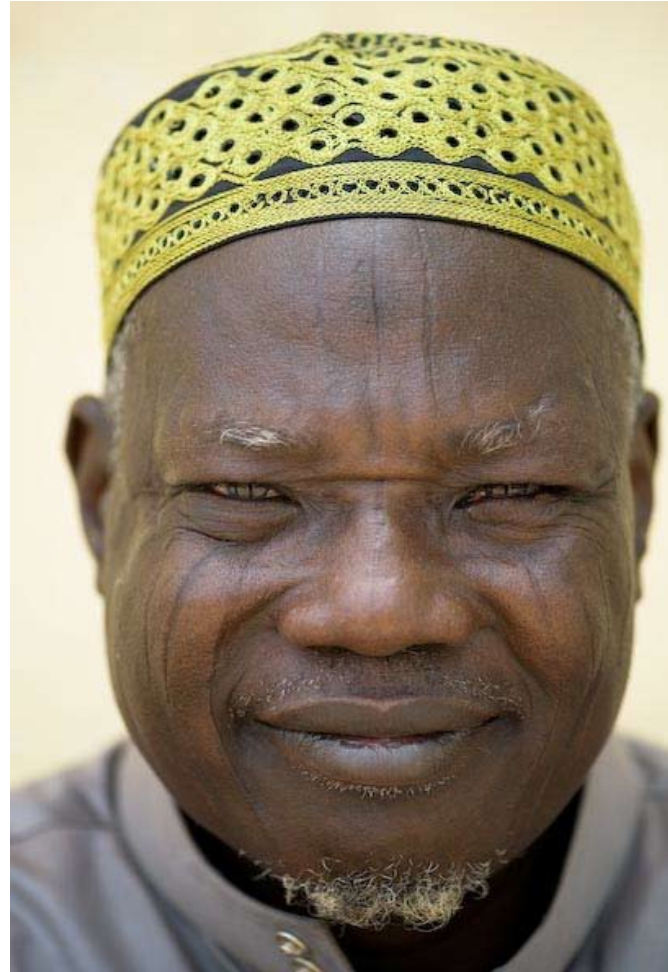
Fish market in Dembé, N'Djamena.

thorities. It's obvious. The police urge the wholesalers to sell to the women who stay outside the union. That puts women off joining us." Rachel explains. The suppliers' refusal to sell to certain women can be disastrous for households relying on their income to make ends meet. "Particularly for widows, women who live alone with their children or whose husbands have lost their jobs" adds Rachel. Despite their problems, the SYFEVEP members stopped work for three days in 2007 to support the strike by the Intersyndicale, the cross-union grouping, to show that they have a role to play at the national level.

They feel completely powerless in face of the war, however. Speaking of the rebel offensive at the beginning of February Rachel says "some of our members sought refuge outside the capital. During the exodus, children fell ill and died.

Those who stayed and tried to keep working suffered from the insecurity, the looting and the sharp fall in supplies. The rise in energy prices has also had a direct impact on the women's incomes. The gasoil used to fuel the generators (only one home in ten in N'Djamena is connected to the electricity supply, which is prone to constant power cuts) is getting more and more expensive. The ice blocks we use to keep the fish fresh are getting too expensive for us (3000 CFA in April)." Nor can they do anything to halt the shrinking of fish stocks linked to the slow death of Lake Chad, which in turn is caused by human activity and global warming. Over the last 40 years, Lake Chad has shrunk dramatically from 25,000km² to less than 3,000 km².

There is just one glimmer of hope, which lies almost exclusively in the hands of one of the UST's most dynamic members. In 2002 the UST expert adviser Khager coordinated trade union training for the women fishmongers. Then, this son of a fishing family became president of the fisherman's association, created to defend the interests of fishermen, and which may in the medium term become a member of the UST. "For the time being" Khager admits, "the association is barely muddling along. They have been let down too many times before and they want to have a clear view of what is happening before they get any further involved. Our aims are ambitious: in addition to defending the interests of fishing workers, we want to reorganise the whole fish distribution chain, which is archaic, and to get rid of all the irregularities." Khager achieved one objective very quickly: putting an end to the illicit "taxes" extorted by armed men from poor and hitherto powerless fishers. In view of the overfishing of Lake Chad, he is also urging the government to provide assistance to fishers to enable them to buy the regulation large mesh nets to avoid catching young fish. "It is our duty to prevent the over-exploitation of the Lake and to do that we must train our young people. The State must help us". In his wildest dreams, Khager has visions of fish farming and refrigerated lorries and store rooms. "The women fishmongers will not be forgotten. There will be no



"We want to reorganise the whole fish distribution chain", UST expert adviser Haroun Khager coordinated trade union training for the women fishmongers.

more discrimination, and the prices of the goods (fresh, dried and smoked fish) will be set by a general assembly of the fishing industry. The decisions affecting everyone down the distribution chain will be taken together."

Marie Koumandial Hanalbaye, Assistant General Secretary of the National Union of Education Professionals (SYNAPET), UST.

I have been an active union member since 1988, exactly 20 years! As far as women's representation on trade union bodies goes, we are making progress, but only at snail's pace. The 30-member UST Executive Bureau had just two women, and this then rose to four. Today there are ten of us. Traditions and in particular religion, both Christianity and Islam, still have a heavy influence. It is difficult for women to assert themselves with men. We are not coordinated when we go to trade union congresses, we haven't had the time to prepare, or to do the lobbying that would prevent us being confronted with the machoism that prevails at these congresses. The men know what they want, they grab the key posts, and palm us off with crumbs. That is what it's like in our culture: the men decide.

One of our main concerns is reconciling our different roles as wives, mothers, workers and trade unionists. If we are married to a trade unionists, it's okay, the husband understands. But if that is not the case, with our interminable meetings, problems soon arise. As mothers, our children's education suffers. If their results aren't as good, it is always our fault, according to our husbands. In terms of our work and our trade union involvement, we take risks, there's no doubt. A lot of women have lost their jobs because they have called for a strike. My trade union activism has landed me in prison. You have to feel passionate about it. Those who don't totally identify with trade union values, those who have not had appropriate training, who aren't available whenever needed, won't be able to resist the pressure we constantly have to bear.

A very elementary education

The proportion of qualified primary school teachers is steadily diminishing in an educational system that favours quantity over quality. Particularly in the east of the country.



After 4 months at the Karai public school in Goz Beida, Djibril is still waiting for his first salary payment.

In Goz Beida, a small town in the east of the country surrounded by camps for Sudanese refugees and displaced Chadians, Djibril, who teaches second year primary pupils, is finishing a maths lesson on purchasing price, cost price and sales price. Money problems are part of daily life for this qualified young primary school teacher who constantly counts the time since his arrival. "I was posted here with my wife four months ago and I haven't been paid yet. We are living in poverty. The cost of living is very high in this town. It is impossible to find a room to rent at less than 20,000 CFA. A chicken costs 4,000 CFA in the market. It's extortionate!" Evariste, the headmaster of the Karai state-run school, confirms that there are serious administrative problems and delays in the payment of salaries, which particularly affects the young teachers. "The new teachers' files are sent off to Abéché, then to the capital. It is very hard for them, although we are also affected by the late payment of salaries. As teachers, we don't have a choice, we have a moral duty towards these children, to help the country's development."

But distance, insecurity, pay arrears and the high cost of living have discouraged more than one teacher, as Mohamed Youssouf Bachar, the departmental inspector from the national education institute, notes. "Seventy nine qualified primary school teachers have been posted to the 104 schools in Dar Sila. But many of them don't come. The latest set of figures shows there are 46 qualified primary school teachers and 55 community school teachers for the whole department." The inspector is less direct on the subject of the oil bonanza, which should have primarily benefited sectors such

as education. "There are some new school buildings. This year we also received 100 tables and benches."

Évariste gives us a tour of his school: a solid central building and a few concrete platforms with corrugated iron roofs where children sit on the ground. Of the 720 registered pupils, 200 live in the nearby displaced persons camps of Koloma and Gouroukoun. Like every Saturday morning, attendance is poor. Nine teachers work here. A young beginner like Djibril is on a salary of 108,000 CFA. The young headmaster, who has only been in his job for two years, doesn't know what assistance came from the UNHCR and the European Union, whose logos are displayed in the school compound. But he knows that UNICEF financed the open classrooms and PAM supports the school canteen, even though it has been closed for the last few days because of a lack of supplies. Evariste is the only staff member present today who is a member of a union, the SET, the Teachers' Union of Chad. He would like to get a bit more support from the organisation, although he realises that he is a long way from the capital, making it hard to make himself and his demands heard.

The camps for displaced persons (Chadians fleeing their villages because of the attacks) a few kilometres from Goz Beida also have schools, but the classrooms are even more rudimentary: UNHCR tarpaulins stretched across wooden posts. The teaching staff are all community teachers, without any specific training. The so-called "spontaneous" or community schools began in the eighties when the implementation of the Structural Adjustment Programmes

led to a reduction in the recruitment of teachers in the public sector. Parents made up for the shortcomings of the public authorities by organising informal education. Over the years, this system has become a little more structured. The State – with the blessing of the World Bank – encourages the “communitarisation” of teaching, arguing that it is the only way to meet the target of “Education for All” by 2015 and that “owing to the persistent strikes, the use of community teachers ensures greater continuity of public sector education” (1). Powerless to do anything else, the teachers’ unions count the cost. As Abakar Majtamat, General Secretary of the National Union of Primary School Teachers of Chad (SNIT, and independent union) explains, “Despite the income from oil, community teachers today represent 60% of teaching staff in primary schools and the authorities aim to increase this to 70% by 2015. These teachers earn about 30,000 CFA; in principle the State pays 25,000 of this and the parents’ associations pay the rest. We don’t officially include them in our membership, but we try to defend their interests nonetheless, in particular by calling on the government to steadily integrate them into the civil service.”

In the Goz Beida displaced persons’ camps, the teachers’ “salary” is paid by the Jesuit Service for Refugees (JRS), the NGO that takes care of the education programme in the camps. Elise Joisel, the head of the service, prefers to call it an “incentive”, to make the State face up to its responsibilities. Education goes beyond the elementary level, but the classrooms are packed. She points to the reason for this high attendance: a sheet metal construction from where a strong sugary smell wafts over. Inside, women from the camp are busy frying doughnuts. “There’s no secret. A working canteen guarantees full classrooms. It’s got to the

stage however where we and Feed the Children, the NGO financing the canteens, have had to speak to the parents to stop them sending underage children to school. »

Elise’s activities are restricted to organising education in the displaced persons’ camps and, when it is safe enough, preparing schools for the children’s return to their home villages. In the Sudanese refugee camps, the UNHCR coordinates all the longer term activities. Unlike the displaced Chadians, where the aim is to help them go home as soon as possible, the Sudanese refugees are not ready to go back. With their small kitchen gardens surrounding their huts, the camps look more like villages. Like the water supply and food rations, the education system is more stable and of a better quality.

Refugees, displaced persons, the local population: surprising though it may seem in eastern Chad, rocked by inter-ethnic battles and cross-border raids, the trend is the same for all: by bringing populations together, more children have been given the opportunity to attend school. While the education inspector has spoken of a 37% rate of attendance in primary school across the department, the aim of the JRS and other humanitarian organisations helping provide education in the camps is to achieve – and they nearly have – an attendance rate of 100%, at least in the first and second years of primary school. After that, it is a different story. Discrimination against girls means they have almost no chance of finishing school. They and the boys also face the very real risk of being enrolled in a para-military self-defence brigade, either by the rebels or by the national army.

(1) From a speech by Namgoutoum Seid, advisor to the National Education Minister, at a seminar in June 2007.

The children in the displaced persons and refugee camps are vulnerable to kidnapping and “enrollment” in the armed bands which are active in the east.



Abused children

The worst forms of child labour are present in Chad. In N'Djamena, social services are virtually non-existent.

"I'm 13. I come from Sudan. A year ago my maternal aunt came to fetch me to live with her in N'Djamena. She said that she had her own house, that she was rich and that in three or four years I could leave. She was lying. She just needed me. I worked hard. I had to do the housework and the shopping. I had to walk for a long time. Then she began to beat me and torture me with razor blades. It ended a few days ago. I arrived at the Koran school late because she had been at me again. The teacher hit me and my back immediately began to bleed heavily. He called a woman teacher to examine me. I had to tell them the truth."

Leila's physical wounds have now healed. She is waiting to see what happens next while she stays with a foster family who are giving her the affection she was deprived of for so long. "The woman will be sentenced, but that won't happen for a few weeks yet" says Nicolas Ignarolet, a social assistant in N'Djamena, before saying goodbye, tenderly, to Leila and her protector. He has no more time. His colleagues are waiting for him at the socio-educational agency. "A passer-by brought us another girl who was wandering the streets. She had been mistreated. We need to ask her some questions, and find her somewhere to stay."

The fifth district's socio-educational agency, where Nicolas has his office, is in the same state as Chad's social system: completely devastated. There are no doors, no materials. "After the war in February the looters came and took what little we had" explains one of the social workers. Crouched in the corner of the room, the little maid dries her tears. "Her name is Malka, she's 12. She is from the Zaghawa tribe, like our president. We are going to entrust her to the head of the Zahhawa community here in N'Djamena, we don't have any other option. There are no shelters for girls who've been abused and have run away. For boys there's a shelter called "Hope" 20 kilometres from the city centre, but it is half empty and very badly run. The children are treated badly."

Toma Bachir, the President of the UST Women's Committee, is also responsible for socio-education services in the N'Djamena town hall. All year round she attends meetings such as those of the National Committee for the Protection of the Child, where she mixes with representatives of the nine ministries on the Committee, and officials from UNICEF, local or international NGOs, as well as religious and traditional leaders, but she deplores the lack of any significant progress. At the seminars they discuss slavery, the trafficking of children sold by their parents and often, via middlemen, to cattle farmers to take care of their stock; of very young girls forced into marriage and into working in their husband's fields or home; of child soldiers, of young children made to beg in the towns by their Koranic masters, of child porters crossing the borders with heavy loads, etc.

Like Nicola, she is angry about the desperate lack of means



Leila, reduced to slavery and tortured over several months by her employer.

in her department and the lack of shelters for the children in N'Djamena. "The few reception centres we have only operate during the day, the girls are very vulnerable to sexual attacks and therefore to sexually transmitted diseases. Our financial resources are derisory. There is a brigade for minors, but the police are primarily concerned with enforcing the law. There is much more focus on fighting crime than for example on respecting the International Convention on the Rights of the Child or the ILO Convention on the Worst Forms of Child Labour."

In N'Djamena, the Yalna association for street children is one of those all too rare reception centres. The director, Jonas Bamaré Alafi, describes the centre's activities. "Every day, children who have suffered family breakdown and often live on the streets come here. We have a literacy centre. In addition to the lessons we give (first year primary in the morning, and second year primary in the afternoon), the children know they can always get a bowl of beans or a bit of soap." It was hard to believe looking at them that day however that the children, mainly little girls, all properly dressed and citing the words of the national hymn in the morning lesson, were

street children. It looked more like a community school. Slightly embarrassed Jonas concedes that “the children who attend our literacy classes have one foot in the street, one foot in the home. The families are very poor. Our first task is prevention, to stop them falling into bad ways. We would need far more resources to deal with street children here, but we hope we will be able to, without outside support.”

In Jonas's office, we are trying to make sense of a sort of calendar on the blackboard marked “Nest visits”, with dates and places written in. Jonas satisfies our curiosity, explaining that “Nests are places where we know we will find street children. We visit them frequently. It is essential if we are to understand these young people, know how they live and try to help them. In N'Djamena, there are three categories of street children: Californians, Colombians and Costa Ricans. They are stages they go through, like a slow initiation. The Californians are between 6 and 12 years old, and have to put up with beatings without complaining. They are trained to steal, they sniff glue. If the child breaks down, then he or she is not made for life on the streets, and can go home. If the child can bear it, then he or she can move on to the next stage, and becomes a Colombian, ready to commit all sorts of petty crimes. The Costa Ricans are between 14 and 20 years old and they are really hard. They attack people, but they are also an ideal target for army or rebel recruiters.”

At first sight the “nest” in Dembé, N'Djamena's biggest mar-

ket, is no different from the rest of this very lively commercial district. But Francis Afetkreo from the Yalna association quickly spots a child. “I know him well. He has been to our literacy centre. I'm going to ask him to get the others.” Just moments later, we are surrounded by ten children. They are very dirty. First Francis jokes with the most restless ones, gives them a slight talking to, feels the swollen arm of a younger child and pulls a face. “None of them are in good health. They often get injured, and they all have some form of skin disease. We try to help them and to give them medical assistance. I went to the dispensary with one of these kids yesterday.”

Just a few dozen metres away, a tiny sheet metal cabin serves as the police station. The officers show us their latest arrest: a man in his twenties dressed in rags, looking more like a vagrant than a “Costa Rican”. He was caught trying to steal, however. He is crouching down on the hard ground, surrounded by police officers. The verdict? A police officer replies tersely “He will be deported from the town. In the east there is nothing but sun and sand. He's had it.” A little later, still in Dembé, we dive into a maze of little streets and briefly visit two small bars in rather insalubrious yards. Adolescents are there side by side with men in military uniform. Women are offering their services. Everyone is drinking adulterated alcohol. The youths look haggard, the adults distrustful. Our questions about child soldiers are met with hostility. They suggest we leave.

7,000 to 10,000 child soldiers

War tears civilian populations apart. In Chad, children are at both ends of the gun

It was in first few months of 2007, after years of denial, that the Chadian authorities reluctantly admitted what everyone knew: Chad's national army used child soldiers⁽¹⁾. Recruiting children wasn't the sole prerogative of the rebels, the regular army was also involved. Following the Paris Commitments⁽²⁾, the Chadian government finally agreed to collaborate with the United Nations. In May, an agreement was signed with UNICEF and, over the next few weeks, over 400 children were removed from the Mongo military camp in the centre of Chad. Although the children had only been in the national army for a very short time – they were children recruited by a former rebel group, the United Front for Change (FUC), which was integrated into the national army following an agreement with the government – it was the first positive result for the campaign against the use of child soldiers in Chad. The campaigners were quickly disillusioned however. Since mid-2007 there has been virtually no progress in demobilizing children. “At the end of 2007, a total of 501 children had been discharged. In 2008, we only know of one case of a child being demobilized. That was in N'Djamena in March. It is because of the resumption of the fighting, but the fact is that we are getting nowhere” sighs Désiré Mohindo, head of UNICEF-Chad's disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration programme.

All observers in the country agree that despite its promises the government has been reluctant to allow humanitarian agencies satisfactory access to the military camps to count the number of child soldiers, the first step towards their demobilisation. Nor did it take them long to understand that

“the goodwill gesture” by the army's top brass – appointing a general to be responsible for child soldiers – was meaningless in a country that has hundreds of generals who at times act just like warlords.

What little progress is made is reduced to nothing every time the violence resumes. “In Moussor, a town east of N'Djamena, we were supposed to collect a group of children, but it was all a shambles and we couldn't get there in time. It was in December. The rebels got there before us and took the children away. It was tragic” recalls Désiré Mohindo “The operating framework is ready, it has been approved by the government, all we need is peace! But we can't wait. With our partners, we have begun reintegration activities for the children who have already been discharged. We organised a workshop here in N'Djamena at the beginning of April with representatives of the government and civil society to set up a prevention campaign. I'm supposed to go to Goz Beida this week⁽³⁾ for a similar programme, but I'm waiting for my travel permit. Since the violence flared up at the beginning of 2008 and the Zoe's Ark affair⁽⁴⁾, the movement of foreigners, humanitarian activists and even UN employees has been strictly regulated, making our task even more complicated” adds the Congolese expert.

⁽¹⁾ The United Nations agencies prefer to speak of “Children associated with armed forces or armed groups”, a broader concept that includes any task that could be performed by boy or girl children: combatants, porters, messengers, spies, sex slaves....

⁽²⁾ In Paris in February 2007 58 States including Chad committed themselves to protecting children against their recruitment and use in armed conflicts

⁽³⁾ Goz Beida is a town in the east of the country, surrounded by camps for Sudanese refugees and displaced persons. For the armed groups, it is fertile ground for the recruitment of child soldiers.

⁽⁴⁾ The name of a French NGO whose staff tried to illegally evacuate 103 children for adoption, claiming they were Darfur orphans.

Humanitarian workers

Humanitarian organisations provide invaluable assistance to the refugees and displaced persons in the east of the country, as well as jobs for local workers. But their management of human resources is not always beyond reproach.

Murder, rapes, child kidnappings, thefts, the destruction of property and crops, the population of eastern Chad suffer more than anyone from attacks by armed groups, be they rebels, soldiers from the national army, common criminals or combatants from a rival ethnic group. Over 250,000 Sudanese refugees, 80,000 Central African refugees and 180,000 displaced persons from within the country live in the camps near the eastern border. They receive aid from thousands of humanitarian workers. Several thousand MINURCAT and EUFOR (1) soldiers are also deployed in the area. Economically, the regions towns are thriving. Abéché, the capital of the Ouaddaï region, is a hub for humanitarian aid and the place where the international organisations have set up their regional headquarters. "The town has been booming economically ever since the humanitarian crisis began three or four years ago. Migrants come to the town looking for work every day. Humanitarian aid is transported in lorries across long distances, so drivers are needed. Building companies are needed. The informal economy is also growing. The humanitarian organisations recruit staff. There are prospects, that's true. But the cost of living is soaring, insecurity is acute and as far as working conditions go, many of the employees of the humanitarian organisations are complaining. A few weeks ago we helped striking employers at the ICRC (2) once more over grievances concerning their pay and flexibility bonuses. Although they are not yet members of the UST, we helped them negotiate with the employer" says Abdel Aziz Harine, president of the UST's regional branch. Barka Mohamed Ahmad, the president of the CLTT's regional branch is equally critical of the humanitarian agencies and NGOs. "Some of them do not seem to have taken on board the principle of decent work or of non-discrimination between Chadian and foreign workers. It is very difficult to negotiate with the employers. So far we have only 112 members in four humanitarian organisations. It's not enough."

The trade unionists of Goz Beida in the south-east of the country feel the odds are stacked against them. This town of about 60,000 inhabitants (8,000 five years ago) is surrounded by camps of Sudanese refugees and displaced Chadians. As Ahmed Ali Sel, president of the local branch of the Confederation of Trade Unions of Chad (CST) explains, "the displaced persons haven't only left their villages, they've also left their fields. They aren't growing crops any more, and prices are soaring. A koro (3) of millet, which cost 200 CFA during the same period (4) two years ago, now costs between 500 and 600 CFA. Added to which, the camps are on land that used to be farmed by the people of Goz Beida." Ahmed works as a nurse in the town's hospital. He believes the local population are treated unfairly. "The refugees have bigger medical teams than the displaced



Many Chadians will do anything to get a job with one of the humanitarian organisations.

persons and the local people. The inhabitants of Goz Beida are the only ones who have to pay for hospital care. I've seen a lot of them hospitalised for malnutrition. In 2004, the hepatitis E epidemic that broke out in the Goz Amer refugee camps also killed several of the townspeople. The humanitarian organisations could show a bit more diplomacy. In two years, apart from one distribution of mosquito nets and two of soap, the locals have had nothing."

When he is told about a meeting with a UNHCR official from Abéché who deplored the interminable slowness of the recruitment procedures when they went through the local authorities, Ahmed explodes. "Corruption is widespread. The Deputy Prefect and the ONAPE(5) civil servant will favour their cousins, even if they have to bring them from the other end of the country. And never mind if it takes months. Job offers are posted in the town, but often there is no point in applying. The humanitarian organisations don't behave properly either. They allow themselves to be persuaded to take on someone or other's "little brother". I understand that they have to look for qualified staff outside of Goz Beida – there are no vocational training schools here and very few qualified workers – but there is no need for them to recruit guards, drivers or kitchen assistants from outside. It is unacceptable, and it has already led to the ransacking of humanitarian organisation's offices by dozens of angry young people. These clashes are at the root of the union's creation. It was because of the violence that we felt we had to do something. Now we are trying to prevent disputes, to anticipate them. We are listening to the young people and then we look for a solution with the humanitarian organisations. When they agree to meet us."

(1) MINURCAT: United Nations Mission in the Central African Republic and Chad, EUFOR: European Union Force in Chad

(2) International Committee of the Red Cross

(3) A unit of measure. One koro equals three kilos.

(4) The "soudure", the period preceding the harvest when short supply pushes up prices

(5) National office for employment promotion.

Publisher responsible in law:
Guy Ryder, General secretary

ITUC

5 Bid du Roi Albert II, Bte 1, 1210-Brussels, Belgium
Tel: +32 2 2240211, Fax: +32 2 201 5815
E-Mail: press@ituc-csi.org • Web Site: <http://www.ituc-csi.org>
Report: Jacky Delorme.
Photos: Jacky Delorme
Editor in Chief: Natacha David
Layout: Vicente Cepedal