

## De Rato sees need for unrelenting efforts to stem Africa's human tragedy

IMF Managing Director Rodrigo de Rato visited Chad on May 19–20, combining policy discussions with the authorities with a firsthand view of one of the refugee camps that Chad is supporting with help from the international community.

In meetings with President Idriss Déby and other senior officials, de Rato discussed the policy challenges facing Chad and the opportunities arising from the country's increased oil revenues. These oil resources, it was agreed, provide an unprecedented means to reduce poverty and make progress toward the UN Millennium Development Goals. To that end, the discussion emphasized the importance of maintaining momentum in policy implementation, including reforms, particularly with respect to fiscal management and the cotton industry.

President Déby also told de Rato about the difficulties his country faces in hosting over 200,000 refugees from the Darfur region of Sudan. The conflict in Darfur, Déby explained, has placed large demands on the national budget—costs that should be equitably shared with the international community. He also cited problems of deforestation, caused by refugees leaving the camps to search for firewood, and pressures on water resources.

The next day, de Rato set out for Oure Cassoni Refugee Camp—one of 12 refugee camps set up by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in eastern Chad. He hoped to gain firsthand knowledge of the adverse effects that African conflicts are having on the economy and living con-

ditions, and call attention to the IMF's postconflict work, which helps countries restore economic institutions in the aftermath of civil and cross-border conflicts.

Escorted by Secretary of State for Economy and Finance Abbas Mahamat Tolli and hosted by UNHCR Representative Ana Liria-Franch, de Rato made the 500-mile (800-km) journey from the capital of N'Djamena to the camp, which is only 10 miles (16 km) from the frontier with Sudan. At Oure Cassoni, he was greeted by refugee representatives as well as representatives from UN agencies and nongovernmental organizations—International Rescue Committee, ACTED (Aid for Technical Cooperation and Development), and Action contre la faim. He presented a donation from the IMF's Civic Program, telling the humanitarian workers at the camp that the IMF joins the international community in supporting Chad's efforts as a host nation for the refugees. "I can only hope," he said, "that before too long the necessary conditions will be established for the refugees to return to their homes in Sudan."

De Rato then spent time visiting the camp, which is home to around 25,000 refugees. At the health center, he sat with a number of the sick—many suffering from nutrition-related ailments—and saw how camp residents were attempting to make their provisional accommodations more homelike by building traditional mud walls around their tents. He also visited a family at home.

In talks with residents and camp workers and in discussions with local officials (including the Sultan of Dar Dilia, whose domain encompasses both town and camp), de Rato heard concerns about the presence of so many refugees in such an inhospitable environment—a stark desert landscape with temperatures soaring above 104 degrees Fahrenheit (40 degrees Celsius). It is clear that the land cannot sustain these large numbers of people (with water supplies a particular problem), but, at present, there is nowhere else for the refugees to go.

The longer-term solution, de Rato said, lay elsewhere. He noted that "armed conflicts have fractured the social fabric and hindered economic development in Africa . . . Efforts toward peace have to be unrelenting so as to end the human tragedy that has affected too many lives in the region." ■



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On a visit to a refugee camp in Chad, de Rato said he hoped "that before too long the necessary conditions will be established for the refugees to return to their homes in Sudan."

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