

Focus Today

WE WANT TO HEAR YOUR OPINION

E-MAIL

focus@emiratestodayonline.com

CALL 04 306 2255

AID FIRST

Nadia Evans, a Dubai-based United Nations officer, gives an insider's view on the humanitarian issues affecting the Middle East.



Darfur needs world attention

Despite the huge scale of the conflict, Darfur seems to drift in and out of the international consciousness. The result? There has been no political solution, violence rages on and humanitarian projects in critical sectors such as health and education remain under-funded.

With 4.2 million people in need of assistance, Darfur is currently the UN's biggest humanitarian operation in the world, and the massive assistance programme will be required well into next year.

Last week, the UN Undersecretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, John Holmes, travelled to southern Darfur. Part of the purpose of his mission was to keep the

relief effort on the international agenda, and deliver to beleaguered civilians the message that they are not forgotten.

After meeting internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Ed Daein camp, home to about 50,000 people, Holmes said: "Clearly after living in camps, in some cases for more than three years, they are frustrated. While they expressed a strong desire to return to their home areas, all the people I spoke with were unequivocal that they would only be able to do so when security conditions were right."

Distressingly, it does not seem that the conditions for their safe and dignified return will be in place any time soon. Civilians continue to be dis-

placed as a result of attacks from all sides – there are about 2.2 million IDPs living in overcrowded camps. With growing populations, many camps can no longer absorb new arrivals, and tensions are rising.

Meanwhile, as the number of people in need of assistance continues to grow, humanitarian operations are threatened by daily attacks on aid workers. Such attacks, including assaults, banditry and hijackings, have increased 150 per cent since June 2006. This year, more than 135 workers were temporarily abducted, armed men invaded 57 humanitarian premises and 88 aid vehicles were hijacked.

The result is that those most in need of aid – largely women



■ John Holmes visits camps in southern Darfur to deliver the message that the refugees have not been forgotten AP

and children – may not receive it. At times nearly one million people have been cut off from assistance because of violence against aid workers.

If the world continues to give sporadic attention to Darfur, the outcome is all too clear: the violence will continue to escalate and the humanitarian situation will deteriorate. We must not allow this

to happen. Humanitarian workers need safe, unimpeded access so that they can reach all those in need.

While the UN continues to press officials in Khartoum for improved humanitarian access and security for aid workers, we must also remember that humanitarian action can never be a substitute for a political solution.

■ To contact Nadia Evans, the partnerships and external relations officer for the UN Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), write to focus@emiratestodayonline.com. The position expressed is personal and does not necessarily reflect the views of the UN.