

frequently argued that if the civilian nature of camps cannot be maintained, or when attacks on personnel occur, then humanitarian assistance must be withdrawn. According to the *World Refugee Survey* (1998, p. 17):

Demilitarization of refugee camps is the absolute *sine qua non* for real asylum. The international community cannot tolerate arms or armies in refugee camps. Armed or criminal elements cannot be allowed to control the distribution of relief supplies. Refugee camps cannot be situated virtually astride the borders of countries from which the refugees originated. The civilian nature of all refugee camps must be restored, and they must be positioned at a proper distance from borders, with physical protection from coercion and legal/political protection from abuse by governments or others.

Although the demilitarization of camps seems to be an obvious solution, a number of problems arise. First, demilitarization is a difficult process -- and it is not part of the mandate of either UNHCR or any relief agencies. Although initial screening and disarming of incoming refugees sometimes is carried out at border crossing points by host authorities, it is not always effective, and not all refugees come through border crossings. Border officials are overwhelmed by numbers, inadequately trained, or otherwise unwilling or unable to accomplish this task, and many arms or combatants "get through" and mix with bona fide refugees. Unless entering combatants are willing to yield their arms, it is almost impossible for unarmed border officials or UNHCR Protection Officers to disarm combatants. Where armed combatants are mixed in with existing refugee camp populations, screening and separating them is notoriously difficult. The only effective way to remove unwilling armed combatants and keep them out is by means of an armed force, and this is something even seasoned and equipped militaries often refuse to take on, as evinced in the Goma camps.

Without adequate military backup, it is difficult to ensure that the civilian nature of a refugee camp is sustained, and that weapons are eliminated from and kept out of camps. Even if actual combatants are excluded from camps (as is required by UNHCR mandate), it is difficult to enforce such exclusion for any length of time. Combatants are easily able to shed their weapons and uniforms in order to enter the camps. In most camp situations, non-combatants and combatants are related to each other (non-combatants are wives, children, parents of combatants). Under these circumstances, it is difficult to determine when a camp should be defined as militarized. Related to this problem of "mixed populations", are situations in which criminals are interspersed among the refugees and similarly difficult to identify and extract.

A second problem is -- Where do the combatants go? When regular camps are emptied of armed combatants, they often establish shadow camps nearby.<sup>23</sup> Shadow camps are security threats on their own, but their proximity to official, non-armed refugee camps make the latter very vulnerable to attack. In a related problem, official camp hospitals often become the facilities that treat war wounded. Even though the combatants may be unarmed when they enter the hospital, the camps are seen as aiding the resistance by serving the medical needs of militarized forces.

The argument for withdrawal of relief agencies, particularly UNHCR, in circumstances of camp militarization was made repeatedly in the case of eastern Zaire, where it was noted that "the militarisation

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<sup>23</sup> On the Thai-Cambodian border, each of the resistance forces established small camps near the large official camps. Women would be brought from the official camps to the shadow camps; sometimes the women went willingly to visit their husbands, but sometimes they went against their will to "service" the combatants.