

UNAMID's publication for the people of Darfur

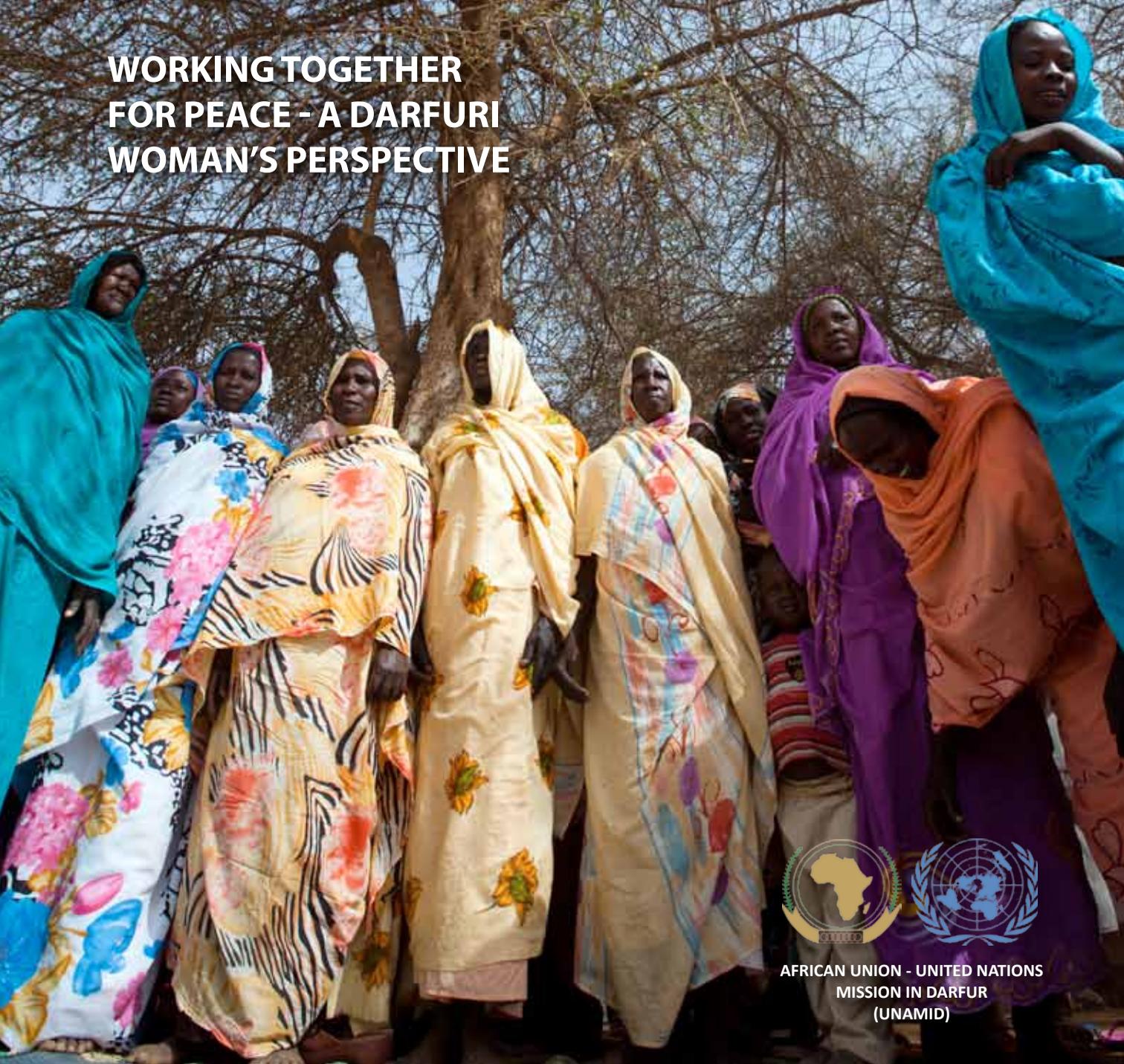
# VOICES

of Darfur

MARCH 2012

**ENDING DARFURI  
WOMEN'S LONG STRUGGLE  
WITH VIOLENCE**

**WORKING TOGETHER  
FOR PEACE - A DARFURI  
WOMAN'S PERSPECTIVE**



**AFRICAN UNION - UNITED NATIONS  
MISSION IN DARFUR  
(UNAMID)**

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# VOICES

of Darfur

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*The Kutum Women's Day celebrations*

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*School girls welcome Deputy Joint Special Representatives Aichatou Mindaoudou Souleymane in Kuma Garadayat*

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# FEBRUARY AT A GLANCE



**FEBRUARY 2** UNAMID Deputy Joint Special Representative – Political (DJSR-P), Aïchatou Mindaoudou Souleymane, announces in Kuma Garadayat, North Darfur, the launch of nine development projects -- commonly known as quick impact projects -- in the areas of education, sanitation, health, community development and women empowerment. “UNAMID is committed to helping communities like Kuma Garadayat rebuild and restart your lives,” she says adding that the projects, which will be constructed by Senegalese peacekeepers, will benefit the whole community and make a real difference in their daily lives.



**FEBRUARY 3** During his visit to UNAMID’s El Fasher headquarters, the Russian Deputy Foreign Minister reiterates his country’s support for the Mission’s efforts, in particular its engagement to advance early recovery and development in Darfur as well as its contribution towards ensuring the timely implementation of the DDPD.



**FEBRUARY 4** UNAMID supports the Al Taylia Sports Club in El Fasher, North Darfur, in celebrating its 50th anniversary under the theme, “Together for Peace and Development in Darfur”. The celebration aims to engage various groups of Darfuris, particularly youth, in positive peace building activities as well as promoting peace messages.



**FEBRUARY 7** A series of workshops for the dissemination of the Doha Document for Peace in Darfur (DDPD) begin in Zalingei, Central Darfur state. The exercise is led by the parties to the DDPD, the Government of Sudan and the Liberation and Justice Movement (LJM), and is supported logistically by UNAMID. More than 150 participants comprising native administrators and religious leaders attend. During February, 10 workshops are planned in Zalingei targeting 1,500 participants drawn from women and youth groups, local authorities, political parties, civil society organizations, academia, farmers and pastoralists as well as internally displaced persons (IDPs). Twelve more workshops will be organized shortly in Nertiti, Rokero, Mukhjar, Bindisi, Garsila, Um Dukhun and Azoum localities for more than 1,800 participants.



**FEBRUARY 8** The Darfur Regional Authority is established under the terms of the DDPD. UN Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon, in a statement attributable to his Spokesperson “reiterates the commitment of the UN to support efforts... to bring peace to Darfur”. He “urges the parties to take immediate steps to implement those provisions of the Agreement that are of greatest concern to the people of Darfur, who have suffered the most from the conflict. In particular, the provisions related to reconciliation, human rights and justice, the establishment of conditions for returns and early recovery and peace dividends. The Secretary General appeals to the Government of Sudan and non-signatory armed movements to enter into negotiations towards a final agreement immediately and without preconditions.”

**FEBRUARY 9** UNAMID Joint Special Representative (JSR) Ibrahim Gambari and senior Mission management officials meet with a university delegation led by the Vice Chancellor, Professor Abdallah Abdelhay, to discuss a broad range of academic activities to make a greater impact on Darfur communities. They discuss issues of mutual interest as well as ways to strengthen relations between the Mission and the University. JSR Gambari reiterates the Mission’s commitment in supporting the people of Darfur, adding that he will look into forging similar partnerships with other major educational institutions in the region.

# FEBRUARY AT A GLANCE

**FEBRUARY 14** In a ceremony attended by Eltigani Seisi, Chairperson of the Darfur Regional Authority (DRA), Government representatives and UNAMID officials, dissemination activities for the Doha Document for Peace in Darfur (DDPD) begin among the communities in West and South Darfur. "The upcoming period will require concerted efforts for putting the Doha Document on the ground and for providing necessary services for the people of Darfur," said Mr. Seisi. He also emphasizes the necessity of ensuring the returns of the internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees to their original villages.

**FEBRUARY 15** Deputy Joint Special Representative, Aïchatou Mindaoudou Souleymane visits Kuma Garadayat, North Darfur, for the second time in this month and reaffirms her commitment to implementation of quick impact projects there, which include two schools, a health clinic, a women's centre and youth centre. The Deputy Joint Special Representative (JSRP) announces that an NGO will begin midwife training in May and that a microcredit project will be started at the new women's centre in the near future. The community of Kuma Garadyat also express their commitment to work with UNAMID on nine projects.

**FEBRUARY 21** The entire 55-person peacekeeping patrol of the African Union-United Nations Mission in Darfur, which had been blockaded in northwestern Darfur by armed rebels for nearly two days, returns to its home base in Umm Baru.



**FEBRUARY 22** UNAMID Force Commander, Lt. Gen. Patrick Nyamvumba, travels to Umm Baru to pay tribute to his troops following the successful return of the patrol which had been blocked by rebel forces for two days in North West Darfur. "We are peacekeepers first and foremost. We are here for peace. However, if there is a need that requires us to use force, we will use it," he says.

**FEBRUARY 24** Two peacekeepers of the African Union - United Nations Mission in Darfur (UNAMID) sustain gunshot wounds near the town of El Daein, roughly one kilometer from the Mission's base camp in East Darfur state, after being targeted by an unknown group. Since the beginning of the year, hostile incidents have left five UNAMID personnel injured and one killed.

**FEBRUARY 28** UNAMID presents 30 wind-up and solar powered radios to the El Fasher Association for the Disabled. The Mission had earlier provided the Association with a new building that will house an audiovisual library. The centre is intended to assist disabled university students, especially the sight-impaired, with accessible materials so they can study in a standard university programme.

**FEBRUARY 29** An ambush by unknown gunmen leaves one peacekeeper dead and three injured. The incident, in which the peacekeepers returned fire, took place near Shearia town roughly 90 kilometres northeast of Nyala, South Darfur.



## WOMEN

## Internally displaced women in West Darfur form union for social reforms and peace

STORY BY EMAELDIN RIJAL

In the wake of the establishment of the Darfur Regional Authority (DRA), earlier this year under the terms of the Doha agreement, more than 300 internally displaced women in El Geneina, the regional capital of West Darfur state, have come together to form a unique union that shows a genuine concern for others and serves as a platform for promoting their rights.

"Such a union could have existed long ago, but our efforts had often been blocked

by challenges that included cautious silence and restricted freedom among the internally displaced community," remarked Ms. Tawheed Abdulgadir Ahmed, the Union's advisor on legal and humanitarian affairs.

"We have been encouraged by both Government officials and local community leaders to go ahead with propagating our views," said the Union's Chairperson, Maryam Adam Hussein.

The idea to start this union flourished most after a recent visit by DRA Chairman, Dr. Eltigani Seisi, to El-Geneina, where he met with women representatives from different camps of internally displaced persons across West Darfur state to discuss the dissemination of the Doha Document for Peace in Darfur (DDPD). During the meeting, the DRA Chairman emphasized the importance of women's engagement in all spheres of life and this spoke to the determination and will of the union's founders. News of

the promise of upcoming social reforms resulting from the formation of such a ground-breaking body spread and the idea has already taken root among the community of displaced persons.

So far, women from the Habila, Fur Baranga, Masteri, Sirba and Goker IDP camps in El Geneina have signed up as members of the union and representatives of their respective camps.

This union of women, above all, longs for development and reconstruction of necessary services that could enable the return of those who have been displaced their original villages. They also hope that pillars of brotherhood and sisterhood can be strengthened, inculcating a culture of social peace among different groups in the internally displaced community. They plan to encourage and support the reconstruction of villages in the area as well as facilitate voluntary returns of all internally displaced persons. They will also participate in programmes for combating children's diseases and aim to provide internally displaced women with livelihoods activities. Moreover, they will campaign for support for the Doha Document.

To achieve all of these aims, members of the union have sought support from official bodies and humanitarian organizations, and from UN agencies working in the state. "We need to cooperate and coordinate with all the relevant bodies for the success of the union's objectives," stressed Tawheed.

Recently, members of the union made an appeal to the African Union-United Nations Mission in Darfur (UNAMID) in this connection. The Mission gave them copies of the Doha agreement to distribute and they have pledged to convey its contents to their families, neighbours and the rest of the internally displaced community. They can certainly expect a high level of support from UNAMID as the UN envoy in Darfur, Ibrahim Gambari, stated during the Women's Day observance on 8 March that, "UNAMID is committed to supporting women's engagement in the peace process and assisting the DRA in bringing the dividends of peace to the people of Darfur, especially women and girls".

## Working together for peace - A Darfuri woman's perspective

STORY BY SHARON LUKUNKA

**W**e are crying out to our husbands, brothers and sons, who are still carrying guns – it is high time to lay the weapons down. Everything is ruined, not only the roads and buildings but also our people. There are not enough educational and health care facilities. We want to rebuild Darfur," said Ms. Um Bashir Mahmoud Sharief, a member of Sudan's national legislature.

"When the sounds of the guns stop, everything will move smoothly. The IDPs, refugees, everyone is afraid of this sound," she lamented.

Darfuri women are playing a very crucial role in their society as it is the women and children who have suffered the most in this conflict. "We as parliamentarians and Darfuri women are working together as one to resolve the issues that have divided us and decide how we can live together in the future for a better and peaceful Darfur," she explained.

The Sudan National Assembly provides for a minimum of 25 per cent of female representation from different parties in Sudan as well as the Darfur region. Female parliamentarians at the national level represent their respective localities; they have to build themselves through training so that they can all participate in building their communities and teaching others. "We encourage the young women today to take advantage of training to better themselves, including by taking English language and computer classes," said Ms. Sharief.

Last year, the Darfur women's legislative caucus signed an agreement with the AU-UN Mission in Darfur (UNAMID) and the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) to support the women with training needs as well as assist with logistical requirements.

Darfuri women are also assiduously working along with civil society representatives and the community of internally displaced persons to discuss how they could contribute to peace building and reconciliation efforts, which are now being encouraged by the international community as Darfur recovers from

the conflict which ravaged the region. Referring to the recently adopted Doha Document for Peace in Darfur (DDPD) by the Sudanese Government and the Liberation and Justice Movement (LJM), the Sudanese lawmaker hopefully said, "We now have a peace agreement to implement. Women leaders are working with everyone in Darfur, including the men, women and youth groups, to inform them that the Doha agreement gives us an opportunity to bring peace to Darfur."

Ms. Sharief represented the women of Darfur during peace negotiations held in Abuja, Tripoli and Doha, all of which called for peace and urged all parties to agree to setting the conditions for prevailing peace for the region.

"Whenever an opportunity arises, we have been passing on the message either through the media or face to face to persuade them to drop arms and join the peace process. During the Doha talks, I had a chance to meet with the movements and discuss the impact of the crisis on our society, particularly on women and children.

"We are at the beginning, but we have to work hard to pave the way for the coming generation. If we have not done this, we would have failed in encouraging other women to join peace and reconciliation efforts," she added.

Ms. Sharief became a member of the National Legislature more than two years ago. She also serves as the Chairperson of the Darfur regional women's caucus and is a strong advocate of women's rights. She aims to teach other women and encourage them to be better citizens in their communities.

Darfuri women lawmakers are establishing themselves as effective tools for peace building initiatives, helping to bridge social divisions, bolster marginalized voices, and strengthen legislative branches of the Government. "One hand cannot clap, you need both hands to clap together. Eight years of conflict is enough. We need to rebuild Darfur," she emphasized.

# Ending Darfuri women's long struggle with violence

STORY BY SHARON LUKUNKA



*An IDP woman showing her sorrow while explaining the increase of rapes in Kassab camp.*

PHOTO BY ALBERT GONZALEZ-FARRAN

**L**ike many women living in Darfur, Irba Ibrahim Abubakar has complained tirelessly of attacks and rapes against them while working outside. “We need to go outside to work so that we can take care of the orphans, the widows and the elderly, and sometimes we are also frightened to go out in the field.”

Irba, a woman leader living in Kassab internally displaced persons camp (IDP) in Kutum town, North Darfur explained that attacks against women in the area were on the increase, and requested the African Union-United Nations Mission in Darfur to enhance its security patrols in and around the camps. “We are faced with attacks by unknown men,” she said. “We need these heinous attacks to stop and the perpetrators need to be brought to justice.”

The protection working group composed of UNAMID and UN agencies meets on a monthly basis to come up with plans and strategies to deliver the priorities of the Integrated Strategic Framework which addresses protection of civilian concerns, tracks progress and identifies issues requiring guidance or intervention by senior officials. In February, the group reported an increase of sexual and gender-based violence in Kutum, particularly in the Kassab IDP camp. The group agreed on intervention measures, including consultation with relevant authorities and training of government security personnel, and requested UNAMID to increase its patrols in potential return areas in order to create a secure environment.

More than eight years after the Darfur conflict broke out, there continues to be

a disturbing number of rapes of women who are usually out working.

“The ongoing conflict in Darfur, the increased criminality and constraints in holding perpetrators of human rights violations accountable continue to expose the courageous Darfuri women, who are the most vulnerable to sexual violence while performing their daily activities, particularly in the vicinity of IDP camps,” says Marie-Therese Keita, Director of UNAMID Human Rights Section. “Initiatives have been taken to address the issue but more concerted effort needs to be deployed to put an end to sexual violence.”

A large number of IDP women have been victims of assault or rape after leaving the relative safety of their camps to gather

wood in the open wilderness. One of the steps taken by UNAMID peacekeepers since they started their mission in 2008 was to establish firewood and farming patrols in order to provide women with protection while conducting their chores outside the camps. Presently, the Mission's troops conduct more than 15 such patrols each day in about 100 IDP camps and villages throughout Darfur.

"The South African troops stationed in Kutum town and the Rwandan battalion in Sortony in North Darfur conducts escort patrols twice a week, travelling to areas more than 30 kilometres away. They spend about seven hours a day escorting women and children to and from the IDP camp to protect them from direct attacks," said Brig. General Mahlobo Sithabiso, UNAMID Sector North Commander. "The Mission also supplies water to the local community to prevent the women from going out to distant places and risking attack," he added.

In response to reports of continuous sexual or gender-based violence (SGBV) cases in Darfur, UNAMID police has established a gender crimes special investigations unit responsible for monitoring and reporting on crimes committed against women and children and to contribute to bringing justice to the victims. This unit focuses on addressing sexually based violence, rehabilitating victims, reducing stigmatization of victims of sexual abuse, and encouraging victims to report incidents freely to law enforcement agencies. It also supports local law enforcement agencies in the investigation of complex cases of violation, such as sexual harassment, child abuse, human trafficking, domestic violence, child abandonment and prostitution, and collaborates with the Mission's Gender and Human Rights sections, local, international and UN bodies, and community and local police authorities.

Christabel Nsiah, a Ghanaian police officer, is deployed in the Zam Zam teamsite in North Darfur as a gender officer. Each morning she joins the patrol team to the displaced persons camps where she and her team have created a gender desk so they can talk to women on issues such as personal hygiene, response to SGBV cases, pre-natal care, early marriage, child labor and culture.

"During our meetings with the women, we encourage every woman to report all SGBV

cases for further investigation," she said. "It is most difficult for these women to come out and report cases of rape in this region, so we are constantly encouraging them to speak out and report all cases... Darfur women find it difficult to approach and report incidents of rape and, most of the time, the family members do not accept talking to the victim for fear of embarrassment. That's a challenge," she added.

UNAMID and the humanitarian community continue to respond to the urgent needs of victims of sexual and gender-based violence in Darfur, in order to create an effective and comprehensive programme of protection.

UNAMID Joint Special Representative (JSR), Ibrahim Gambari, has expressed his deep concern about the reports of violence and rape cases, requesting the Mission last year to double its security patrols in order to ensure full protection of civilians.

The JSR vowed to take up the issue of impunity with the local authorities. "Where the people who are engaged in criminal acts are known, they must be brought to justice. As a result of our pressure, now they [the Government of Sudan] have appointed a Special Court and a Special Prosecutor for Darfur," he stated.

The Mission continues to monitor cases of sexual and gender-based violence through its dedicated human rights team to ensure that due process is respected and to raise concerns with the relevant authorities. UNAMID has conducted several trainings for local medical personnel, police and prosecution officers, ensuring that victims receive medical treatment. The Mission also assists victims in need of legal support through collaboration with other UN agencies to ensure the rights of the victims are respected.

Awareness-raising activities for women and traditional leaders in displaced persons camps has helped the community develop protection mechanisms such as the formation of firewood collection groups, daily security patrols and regular meetings with residents of the camps.

"We are aware that women and girls have to go out to perform their chores so we encourage them to always travel in groups and report all cases to the police," said Christabel Nsiah. "We encourage the women by telling them that when they report these incidents, they are helping to stop more attacks."

*Women from Kassab IDP camp express their distress against sexual violence at a recent meeting with JSR Gambari.*

PHOTO BY ALBERT GONZALEZ-FARRAN



# Young Darfuri to start newspaper on social issues and culture

INTERVIEW BY ALA MAYYAH



Mashair Shahadin

PHOTO: SHARON LUKUNKA

**T**wenty-nine year-old Mashair, a young Darfuri woman, works in UNAMID's Human Resources section in El Fasher, North Darfur. She is enthusiastic to contribute to the development of her hometown. She believes that local literature and cultural activities have an active role in social development, especially when they tackle women's issues in Darfur. Along with a group of Darfuri women, she is currently preparing to publish a newspaper focused on various local issues. Voices of Darfur interviewed her about this ambitious project.

**Voices of Darfur:** What made you decide to establish the newspaper?

**Mashair** I thought of it almost seven months ago, when I was on my maternity leave. I wanted to do something that would help in raising awareness of Darfuris about various social and cultural issues, so I thought of starting a newspaper for this purpose and shared the idea with my friends who expressed they wanted to work on it with me.

**VoD** How many persons are working with you on this project?

**Mashair** Until now, we are 10 Darfuri women. We are all college graduates and we're working in different sections of UNAMID. We share the same vision and hopes for this project to see the light. We're all working hard on it and the local staff association is helping us with technical support and guidance.

**VoD** Whom do you hope to appeal to through the newspaper?

**Mashair** In the beginning, the newspaper will be targeting UNAMID staff in all components of the Mission. Some print copies will be exhibited internally on display boards in the headquarters compound in El Fasher. If the newspaper is to succeed and become popular, we will target Darfuri youth, females and males together, through wider dissemination in the city. Besides youth, we would want to also reach key women figures such as legislators and officials in various government institutions as they can be good supporters of the newspaper since it's about empowering Darfuri women among other local issues.

**VoD** What kind of issues the newspaper focus on specifically?

**Mashair** We mostly want to draw attention to concerns of Darfuri women. We also want to write about Darfur's culture in general, including social traditions. This will help show our culture to our foreign colleagues in the Mission as we will produce an English version along with the Arabic one. But we want also to target the local staff hoping these stories will help raise their awareness and motivate them to take positive initiatives to combat some wrong practices, such as violence against women. We will also provide educational reports on general issues such as healthcare, technology and nutrition and sports.

**VoD** Has being a UNAMID staff member for five years raised your awareness about women's rights or encouraged you to be active in this area?

**Mashair** Yes -- to some extent. I become familiar with the efforts being made to tackle women's issues in the region as I learn about the activities of the Gender advisory unit in the Mission. But I've always been interested in supporting women and children's rights in Darfur even before working with the UN. And my academic study in college where I majored in social science as well as knowing the situation in Darfur is probably what made me interested in participating in our social development. I hope that this newspaper will motivate other Darfuris to participate in developing a society free from all kinds of violence, not only against women.

**VoD** Have you chosen a name for your newspaper?

**Mashair** We identified a name among other local names, which we will decide on in our next meeting this month.

**VoD** When do you intend to launch the newspaper?

**Mashair** Hopefully during this month, March.

# Community radio for peace and development

STORY BY EMAELDIN RIJAL

In West Darfur, community radio serves as an organizing tool for development in addition to functioning as a means to provide vital information to people especially in remote and isolated rural areas.

As a means of human development, the community radio serves to provide local communities with the opportunity to air their concerns and represent their cultures. According to Ms. Farahat Abdallah Badein, Coordinator of the Community Radio Listening Project (CRLP), this had never existed before in the state. The project is a joint initiative between local government authorities and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) in West Darfur state and was launched in 2002 with the idea of holding the hands of rural communities as they navigate the unknown terrain of community radio.

This radio project is a community oriented service that is broadcast every day except for Fridays, in three distinct news programmes that cover topics ranging from health and education to peace building. The broadcast reaches out to a wide audience from Guker, Mullei, Eish Barra, Marra Jarribi, Adikong, Kurti, Saraf Jiddad, Sirba, Kondabi, Kanjaki, Gargar, Beir Daggeig, Amaralla, Azirnei, Habila Kannarri, Goz Meitu, and other surrounding villages in West Darfur.

Ms. Badein is convinced that "the involvement of select communities can enhance sustainability of the project" as public affairs broadcasting lies at the heart of the CRLP's mission and vision for a more peaceful and co-existing society.

The project relies on funds from UNICEF in order to achieve its specific objectives that include ensuring communities and individuals have accurate information for adopting safer and healthier practices and behaviors in favour of child survival and development, mainly in nutrition, education, water and environmental sanitation, HIV/AIDS and child protection. Programmes are produced on social activities meant to foster peace and communities are also able share and exchange ideas, views, information and



*At the mike - One of the announcers at the West Darfur community radio station*

PHOTOS BY: EMAELDIN RIJAL

cultures. Programmes are aired in the local languages of the Zaghawa, Aringa, Massaleit, Fur, Bargu, Marareit, and Tama tribes, as well as in two other local dialects of colloquial Arabic to ensure an easy flow of information to audiences in their respective areas.

Being implemented by the state-run El Geneina radio station, the project in its programming relies heavily on a variety of well-trained listening groups from the target communities, which routinely produce and record programmes about concerns in their villages. These groups also identify information needs that become the source for programming on the community radio station. They work under the direct guidance of several broadcasters from El Geneina radio station who provide facilities to produce and broadcast programmes for an estimated 400,000 listeners of a range of Darfur's culture, languages and ages. "The listening groups are supervised and tutored on a monthly basis on how to record, prepare and produce their programmes on cassette recorders," said Mubarak Khatir,

one of the media practitioners on the community radio project.

Although the station broadcasts on the FM frequency that allows transmission to an approximately 65-kilometre area, some target areas are located beyond the reach of coverage. Among other obstacles to the work of the CRLP is a lack of funds and facilities, due to which the station has sought assistance by selling airtime and collecting donations or grants to support the project.

UNAMID has also supported the community radio project under its quick impact projects scheme, constructing an office and studio for its services.

Ms. Badein stated that among the CRLP's future plans, children-oriented programmes would be produced and broadcast when sufficient funds become available.



## A gift of hope

Local charity association helps vulnerable Darfuris

STORY BY ALA MAYYAH

**A**watif Ibrahim, a nine-year old girl, was prevented from going to school last year because her family couldn't afford the tuition. Barely eking out a living from temporary menial jobs in El Fasher, North Darfur, her mother went to a local charity asking for help. The charity's benefactress Halima Tibin Bosh, a

Darfuri woman known for her generosity, agreed to pay Awatif's tuition not just for the moment but for many years to come and told them to return the following Monday morning for brunch.

On Monday, as Awatif and her mother approached the centre they could see a

large crowd already at the gate: women, children and elderly men were all coming for brunch. And more were waiting inside. Some women were reading the Quran in a side room while several older men sat in a shaded corner in the front yard watching children at play. Within an hour, food was served on large trays, each



*Sharing a meal at the Charity Association for Community Development.*

PHOTO BY SHARON LUKUNKA

consisting of plates full of lamb chops, stewed liver with vegetables and beans, hot soup and plenty of bread.

That free brunch has been part of many other services that the charity provides for the disadvantaged since it was established in 2004, under the name,

Charity Association for Community Development.

“Before establishing the Association, which was one year after the conflict started, I noticed the increased number of people who gathered near my house asking for help. They would wait under a tree just across the road on an empty lot of land. That’s how I thought of establishing a place through which I could effectively help the needy. We have all suffered from the conflict in Darfur. This desperate poverty is just one of its terrible consequences, and we have to stand up for each other as one community at such times,” Halima says.

Along with the weekly meals, the Association prepares free meals during the month of Ramadan (Iftar or dinner) for almost 5,000 persons from El Fasher and its outskirts. The Association also gives away clothes, blankets, medicine, and shrouds, as well as education tuition, cash assistance and full funding for the holy pilgrimage to Mecca (hajj) for 10 persons each year. It also offers awareness-raising training on various issues such as children and women’s rights, and first aid training in cooperation with the Sudan Red Crescent organization.

“Most of the Association’s beneficiaries are women who don’t have jobs or any support. Their husbands have either died or disappeared during the conflict,” Halima says. “But there are also plenty of homeless children and neglected elderly men and we assist everyone without discriminating,” she adds.

Three dedicated employees, a female social worker who counsels the women, especially victims who have experienced violence, and two administrative staff members run the charity. The cooking is done usually by some of the women who benefit from its services.

As for external support, Halima says “We receive assistance from the Wali, Mr. Othman Kibir. He thankfully donates each Ramadan. During the holy month, we also receive support from the Red Crescent in United Arab Emirates, which is headed by Shiekh Hamdan Bin Zayed Al Nahian, the Governor’s representative in the western area. Their donations are arranged by his wife Sheikha Shamsa Al Nahian. Our other patron is my friend Ms.

Salwa Al Shebani, a renowned business woman from Abu Dhabi. I extend my optimal gratitude to them all as these donations are helping many Darfuris here,” Halima says.

“We intend to keep records of each vulnerable person in the Association, in an organized filing system reflecting their situations, their needs and their contact details. We want to do this because new supporters may prefer helping directly, not through the Association. So we will provide them with these files to help facilitate their mission,” Halima explains.

Women gather around Halima once she shows up at the Association. They sit together in a large room to have a chat while a big meal is being prepared in the kitchen. Most of them are accompanied by their children. Among those is Insaf Ahmed, a woman in her thirties. She has six children, two of them are three-month old twin boys. “My husband disappeared almost four months ago. Some unknown men attacked him when he was on his way from Um Durman to El Fasher and since then I haven’t heard from him. And now, the only support I get is from this Association,” Insaf says with teary eyes. She goes every week with her children for the meal and for the moral support that she receives from others.

Insaf is one of hundreds of other women in a similar situation. Most of them fled from nearby villages to El Fasher due to the conflict some years ago.

“Needy people gather in the Association not only for assistance, but they talk to each other, share a meal and become friends. They are part of a community here where they can find hope and compassion,” Halima says.

Since 2010, Halima Tibin Bosh has occupied the position of Advisor on women and children’s issues for the Wali (Governor) of North Darfur. Since her appointment, she has organized a number of workshops on related issues for Darfuris, coordinating several with the African Union-United Nations Mission in Darfur (UNAMID).



*The original Altalia football team*

PHOTO COURTESY OF ALTALIA CLUB

## Altalia sports, cultural and social club

### A profile of the club's history and activities

STORY BY ALA MAYYAH

It was 1961 when Altalia club was founded and registered in the local Football Union in El Fasher city, North Darfur. Despite the lack of capital, the club's founders were determined to win. Keeping it running to serve their community meant victory to them. It posed a challenge as well.

"They were ten Darfuri gentlemen who shared optimism and love for their hometown. Some of them have passed away, but their noble purpose is still bringing good to the community," says Chairperson of Altalia, Adam Ibrahim. "The name they chose 'Altalia' means vanguard or the front, and reflects their ambitious spirit, which was not personal but rather for the people's benefit," he adds.

Moving from one place to another, the club struggled for some years to have a stable location. And until now, it has been using the public courts of the local

Football Union for training. Since 2005, Altalia has been located in the northern side of the city, on Alqubba Avenue. North Darfur state Wali, Othman Kibir, presented the administration office and the opening ceremony was attended by President Omar Al Bashir. A milestone in the front yard is inscripted to memorialize the occasion. "It makes us proud," Mr. Ibrahim says.

As for sports, Altalia club is known for its highly professional football team. Members have changed over the years, but the quality of players has always been one of the best in the state. Besides the local matches, Altalia football team participates in the country-level tournament, "Almoumtaz", along with 14 football teams from all over Sudan. Until 1990, the team was at the top of the national ranking, but then it dropped. "We had to train harder -- almost five days a week," said Abdul Aziz Salim. He was one

of the players on the team at that time and is now its technical manager. "Thirteen new players were also brought to the team," he adds, "even two highly skilled new coaches were hired to train us. Our training hours were increased from two to three and a half hours for each session. Eventually, the efforts were fruitful as we started winning local matches again and then the preliminary matches in North Darfur state for the Sudan Cup."

In 2006, a strong Altalia football team won the Sudan Cup. Today the club still has one of the best football teams at the state level.

Having a stable location has enabled Altalia club to serve its community in even more tangible aspects. It built a kindergarten centre in the club's vicinity for less privileged children, which was launched simultaneously with the club's opening in 2005. With minimal

annual fees of 50 Sudanese pounds, the kindergarten is serving nearly 210 children. Five teachers – all women -- paid by the Government form the school's staff. Along with these programmes, the club also stages plays and musical concerts — it has its own band -- around the city. In addition, the club collaborates with the African Union-United Nations Mission in Darfur (UNAMID) in organizing awareness-raising events on HIV/AIDS, as well as with Red Crescent to provide first aid training for local persons. Furthermore, they arrange literacy classes for adults from time to time.

With a low monthly membership fee of 10 Sudanese pounds and 50 Sudanese pounds for board members, raising funds has always been a tough challenge for the club. But with support of “friends”, the club is succeeding. “UNAMID has become one of our active supporters since last year. It has been cooperating with us in organizing many of our activities. We also receive cash donations from individuals once in a while, as well as in-kind assistance such as sports equipment,” Mr. Ibrahim said. Currently, the Alitalia club has 320 members and 15 directors on its board.

Adam Ibrahim is optimistic about the club's future plans. It is planning to start female volley ball and basketball teams for girls and women between 15 and 25 years old. The courts are to be built in the club's vicinity. “So far we've got official permission and we had discussions with UNAMID on possible funds for the construction of these courts. Hopefully the project will be realized during this year,” he stated.

Alitalia also intends to build a football stadium near Abu Shouk and Al-Salam camps for internally displaced persons. “There are 17 football teams in Abu Shouk and another 17 in Al Salam so, hopefully, if we can build a stadium near to these areas that will help the youth there enjoy better sports facilities,” Mr. Ibrahim explained.

Presently, the club owns 2,000 square metres of land and has plans to build better administration offices, courts for basketball and volley ball, as well as an investment complex of offices and shops. The club also has a large lot of land of 20,000 square metres located North of



*The club's headquarters in El Fasher*

PHOTO: ALBERT GONZALEZ FARRAN



*Members of the present Alitalia football team*

PHOTO COURTESY OF ALTALIA CLUB

Bergounji farm in El Fasher. This, they hope, will be used to create a family resort and a football stadium. It will be the first tourism project of its kind in the city.

On 2 February this year, Alitalia celebrated its golden jubilee with week-long ceremonies, including football matches, horse races, dramas and concerts, all organized in cooperation with UNAMID. Thousands of Darfuris attended the activities as supporters.

“This is the victory for us, to stay active throughout the years, serving Darfuris and representing our city in a noble way... I encourage all youth in cities and camps to engage in sports and cultural activities because such activities can only bring them together in a positive manner that will serve to maintain peace and harmony in our community,” Mr. Ibrahim said.



The debate at El Fasher University

PHOTO: SHARON LUKUNKA

## University students discuss solutions for sustainable peace

STORY BY ALA MAYYAH

**A**lthough the conflict in Darfur was waged for several reasons, economics and politics have always been among the major causes. On 1 March, UNAMID organized a debate at El Fasher University, North Darfur, for the students to discuss whether the solution for sustainable peace in Darfur is political or economic. The event was conducted in cooperation with the University Centre for Peace and Development Studies. More than 300 students attended the debate and almost half were female.

The members of both debating teams were activists in the peace building and development efforts, and some of them, such as Dr. Salwa Mukhtar Saleh, who supported the economic solution, lecture at the university. After the debate, student attendees expressed their opinions. Although the views varied, the discussion was calm and what came through clearly was a shared need for sustainable peace.

"I came to the debate today because it addresses solutions for peace in Darfur which is a major issue for me as a Darfuri. I'm among many who have been suffering

from the consequences of the conflict," Said Huda Adam, a female student at the University. She has been studying at the College of Medicine for the past seven years, yet she is still has not attained her undergraduate degree. "The economy is badly affected by the conflict, and that has caused a serious deterioration for other major aspects such as education," she explains. "For example, some colleges severely lack study facilities and tutors, including faculty members, due to lack of finance. These factors all lead to a delay in our studies causing many of us to spend extra years in school before we can graduate."

Some argued that both political and economic solutions were important to achieve peace and development in Darfur. "Darfur has suffered a lot during the conflict. Achieving peace now would be possible only if there will be fair policies, and job opportunities that should be given without ethnic discrimination," said Majida Ahmad, a lecturer at El Fasher University.

In his opening speech, UNAMID Joint Special Representative (JSR), Ibrahim

Gambari, stressed the importance of education and the role of students in Darfur's future. "Education is critical to peace. And that is fully addressed in the Doha Document for Peace in Darfur," JSR Gambari said. "You students are the hope and the future of Darfur. Your constructive engagement will be key in advancing and consolidating the efforts for peace."

The JSR highlighted the importance of the Doha Document, encouraging the students to be familiar with its contents as it was now being implemented in Darfur. He informed them that several community workshops were being held on dissemination of the Document. He also used the opportunity to urge those movements that had not adopted the agreement to do so urgently.

In the end, the majority voted for a political solution to peace in the region, but some attendees expressed that even more issues, such as cultural aspects, should be added to the discussion since ethnic discrimination also had some influence and played a part in the conflict.



a group of school girls perform a skit at the El Fasher Women's Day event

PHOTO ZAHIRUL ISLAM

## Women's Day celebrated in Darfur

STORY BY EMAELDIN RIJAL

This year's 101st anniversary of International Women's Day, was marked with pomp in El Fasher, North Darfur state, as well as in East, West, Central and South Darfur states. It certainly left all those who attended, including Government officials, with a sense of obligation to espouse gender equality and the empowerment of women.

A march through the city of El Fasher was held by North Darfur Governor's Office for Women and Children's Affairs in collaboration with the African Union-United Nations Mission in Darfur (UNAMID) and the UN country team under the theme, "Connecting girls, inspiring futures" as well as a global theme, "Empowering rural women and girls within the current challenges".

Groups of mostly women and girls, some on wheel-chairs, led by a band, picked their way through the town to Al-Nagaah stadium, carrying banners with varying messages. Some read – "Girls' education is the road to the future", "Early examination of breast cancer for a secure life and good

health", and "Rural women are the future of a developed and civilized community".

Primary and secondary school girls recited poems and performed skits that gave an overwhelming sense of the occasion.

"Such a ceremony has a special meaning all over Darfur where women are considered to have suffered the most from the situation in the region," said the Wali (Governor) of North Darfur State, Mohammed Othman Yousuf Kibbir, who was among many speakers at the proceedings. He reaffirmed his commitment to protecting and sponsoring women's rights.

"We must ensure women have the rights to cope with today's society and requirements," stated Dr. Eltigani Seisi, Chairman of the Darfur Regional Authority (DRA).

Meanwhile, the Wali's Advisor on women and children's affairs, Ms. Halima Tibbin Boush, highlighted that women's social,

economic and political achievements in Darfur are significant and speak for themselves. However, she called for further involvement of women in development programmes to realize lasting peace and stability across the region.

Joint Special Representative of the African Union-United Nations Mission in Darfur (UNAMID), Ibrahim Gambari, delivered UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's message for the Day. "Gender equality and the empowerment of women are gaining ground worldwide. However, despite this momentum, there is a long way to go before women and girls can be said to enjoy the fundamental rights, freedom and dignity," he said. The JSR also emphasized that "UNAMID is committed to supporting women's engagement in the peace process and assisting the DRA in bringing the dividends of peace to the people of Darfur, especially women and girls".



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