



UNAMID's publication for the people of Darfur

VOICES

of Darfur

APRIL 2012

**PROTECTION OF CIVILIANS
- ADOPTING A ROBUST
POSTURE**

**TACKLING REMNANTS
OF CONFLICT**



AFRICAN UNION - UNITED NATIONS
MISSION IN DARFUR
(UNAMID)

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VOICES of Darfur

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MARCH AT A GLANCE

MARCH 1 Students at El Fasher University, North Darfur debate whether an economic or political solution is the answer to the Darfur conflict. The annual event, organized by the University's Centre for Peace, Development and Human Rights and the African Union-United Nations Mission in Darfur (UNAMID), is opened by North Darfur Wali (Governor) Osman Mohamed Yousif Kibir and UNAMID Joint Special Representative Ibrahim Gambari.

MARCH 3 More than 200 people, mostly internally displaced persons (IDPs), participate in the official launch of the Doha Document for Peace in Darfur (DDPD), in Nyala, South Darfur. "The exercise aims at delivering the DDPD text and communicating its content to increase greater awareness of the peace agreement and what it holds for the people of Darfur. The parties need to ensure that the message of the DDPD is taken to every corner of Darfur," says JSR Ibrahim Gambari.

MARCH 5 A new school to accommodate more than 500 students is inaugurated at the Zam Zam IDP camp by UNAMID Force Commander Lt General Patrick Nyamvumba. Construction on Turba Primary School, which commenced in May 2011 under the Mission's quick impact projects (QIP) initiative, was carried out by UNAMID's Rwandese Battalion with participation from the local community.



MARCH 8 UNAMID observes International Women's Day with events in all Darfur states with participation by a cross-section of Darfuris through cultural and awareness-raising activities.

MARCH 9 UNAMID concludes a week-long verification exercise of the Liberation and Justice Movement (LJM) military dispositions. The exercise is a key element of the DDPD and aims at preparing the ground for disengagement and redeployment of the parties' forces. UNAMID's Force Commander, Lt. Gen. Patrick Nyamvumba, Chairman of the Ceasefire Commission, says, "The verification is crucial to the final security arrangements of the DDPD because it determines the number of the combatants, and will also determine what is required in terms of logistic support."

MARCH 13 UNAMID begins a two-day medical camp for inmates at Nyala central prison, South Darfur. The exercise, organized in collaboration with the State Ministry of Health and the UN World Health Organization (WHO), will treat prisoners who do not have regular access to health services at the detention center.



MARCH 14 The four-day UN inter-agency games begin in Kigali. A total of 700 athletes from more than one dozen UN offices, missions and agencies participate in the historic event, marking the first time the games have been held in Africa. Participants compete in badminton, basketball, football, golf, table-tennis, tennis, track and field, volleyball and chess.



MARCH 21 An innovative pump, by which water is drawn when children play on a merry-go-round, is installed by UNAMID in Abu Shouk village, near El Fasher, North Darfur. The Mission's initiative provides an easy and fast way to extract water in a manner that is eco-friendly and entertaining.

UNAMID is supporting other projects in Darfur to facilitate the access to water for the local population. One of them is the distribution of high-capacity water roller containers. Yesterday the Mission provided carriers to the Child Reformatory Centre in El Fasher for use in transporting water more easily than traditional methods.



MARCH 28 UNAMID JSR Gambari, visits Kabkabiya to sympathize with the community for the loss of lives which occurred the day before, 27 March, following violence that erupted during demonstrations in the area over the planned relocation of a local market, reportedly without prior consultations with the concerned communities.

Addressing local leaders, Gambari assures them of UNAMID's support for a peaceful resolution to the situation, which led to the death of three civilians in the North Darfur community, and appeals to them to continue their efforts for peaceful co-existence. He offers the Mission's assistance in mediating a solution to the situation that led to demonstrations and the unfortunate loss of life.



PROTECTION OF CIVILIANS

Adopting a robust posture

STORY BY ABDULLAHI SHUAIBU

The core mandate of the African Union-United Nations Mission in Darfur (UNAMID) is protecting civilians from the threat of attacks, facilitating the delivery of humanitarian assistance to the needy, supporting the peace process and, overall, to ensure a secure and stable environment for peace and development to thrive.

Since January 2008, UNAMID has lost some 36 personnel in ambushes or attacks, or through other incidents, while they were in the line of duty. Also, several members of the Mission have been abducted or briefly detained.

In this interview, Voices of Darfur talks with Lieutenant General Patrick Nyamvumba, UNAMID's Force Commander, on current developments in Darfur on security and protection of civilians, as well as on the challenges facing his troops.

VoD What is the current security situation in Darfur and has it changed over the past year?

Nyamvumba The security situation in Darfur has improved for the better. You will recall from the time of the establishment of the Mission that the security situation was indeed very fragile. As we can see it now,

there is a dramatic decrease in factional fighting among the armed movements and the number of fatalities has also dropped compared to what it used to be in the last few years. Although we still have other challenges with criminality, which is expected in a region that has been infested by conflict in the last eight years. Such criminal activities include the proliferation of small arms and absence of law and order. Generally, the security situation has improved drastically and it is continuing to improve as time goes by.

VoD What is your current access in the Darfur region and are you confident that



UNAMID Force Commander Lieutenant General Patrick Nyamvumba

PHOTO BY ALBERT GONZALEZ-FARRAN

the Mission is achieving its core mandate of protecting civilians?

Nyamvumba Yes, we are protecting civilians. If you look at where we were and where we are now, the military component now sends out an average of 168 patrols per day compared to 90 patrols last year, which is an increment of more than 100 per cent in terms of our visibility and access capability. Therefore, what this means is that we now have a big presence and signature. The more we are visible on the ground, the more we fly the UN and AU flag and the more we give confidence to the people of Darfur.

It does come with a deterrent effect and we are contributing significantly to the core mandate of protecting civilians and ensuring peace and security in the region.

VoD Then, what are the key challenges and how are you overcoming them?

Nyamvumba Well, we still have challenges as a Mission. The biggest one in my view is the absence of a comprehensive peace agreement. However, we have made some positive strides at the moment, to the extent that we now have an agreement in the form of the Doha Document for Peace in Darfur (DDPD), but it falls short of an inclusive agreement, because you still have hold-out movements who are not parties to it. Therefore, what that this means is that the situation where every armed group is not party to the agreement poses a great challenge whether political or operational. We also have challenges of accessing some areas, particularly the area of Jebel Marra and we face a lack of infrastructure in Darfur. Therefore, where we want to make our presence felt, we cannot because of lack of roads and the like. But, the most important challenge is a lack of an all-inclusive comprehensive peace agreement and we are continuing to encourage the armed movements to support the peace process.

VoD What is meant by a "robust posture"? How has the Mission's force adopted this and what have been the results?

Nyamvumba Well, robust posture can have different interpretations. In my view, robustness begins with the state of one's mind. We have to acknowledge that the nature of peacekeeping has changed and evolved since the second half of the 1990s -- that is why you talk of protection of civilians. Before, in the eighties and early nineties, peacekeeping was about observers going to warring factions, in order to bring the belligerents to a ceasefire and for them to respect it. But, events in the Balkans and in my own country [Rwanda] in a way changed the perception and the nature of peacekeeping and how it ought to be done. Right now in Darfur, many armed groups who are not accountable to anyone are in existence and all of these contribute to general insecurity and the impediment of the Mission's core mandate of protecting civilians. However,

we have been urging peacekeepers that they have to overcome some of these obstacles placed in their way, even if it requires use of force. Secondly, robustness, in the sense of an imminent threat to civilians, means we have to exercise the use of force, so those who are under threat are protected.

UNAMID adopted that robust posture in some instances. In 2010, we had serious clashes in Shangil Tobaya, Khor Abeche and other incidents in Mahagriya, so peacekeepers went out of their base camps, reinforced and offered protection to those who were under threat. As we speak, some of our team sites are occupied by people who came to us for protection. Also, not long ago, one of our patrols was blocked in West Darfur by one of the armed movements, but added to that two of our local staff were taken by the armed movement who was responsible for the blockade. The first option was to resolve this peacefully. If we did not show resolve we could become easy prey for this armed movement. In this particular case, we negotiated for 48 hours to take back our staff and had to do it in such a way to communicate to the armed movement directly and visibly that they had an option to either surrender those people or we were going to take them by force. Thankfully, they opted to give us back our people without a fight.

Of course, on a daily basis, our patrols encounter some of these obstacles and if we present ourselves as a weak force, we will lose a lot of peacekeepers and equipment. We have to show resolve and when it's required, we will exercise the rules of engagement in defence of the mandate. There was also an attack in Zam Zam in November last year where the peacekeepers fought forcibly to get out of the situation and some of the attackers were killed. Overall, Chapter 7 of the UN Charter, cited in the UN Security Council resolution 1769 authorizes UNAMID to use force and not only for the protection of civilians, but also to protect its force and to ensure the unhindered movement of its personnel and aid workers.

VoD The humanitarian crisis is deeply rooted in the conflict affecting Darfur. In your view what can be the contribution of your troops to alleviate the current humanitarian crisis and to help prevent a relapse in the security situation?

Nyamvumba The humanitarian issue is a mandated task and we are involved in terms of contributing to easy access for humanitarian workers and the delivery of humanitarian assistance. First we create corridors to ensure free delivery of humanitarian supplies and secondly, we create area security so that humanitarian actors can perform their services without threats. But we also offer physical protection to the humanitarian agencies. In extreme cases like what happened in 2010 in Khor Abeche and Shangil Tobaya, the military also had to physically deliver some of these supplies because of the fragile security situation.

VoD Can you briefly describe how UNAMID is proposing to reconfigure its forces to better meet its protection of civilians mandate?

Nyamvumba It is actually about enhancing our capability to do better to improve on what we have. It will be recalled that in 2007-2008 before UNAMID took over from the African Mission in Sudan (AMIS), there was a need to put the force on the ground and in the process of generating the units, we also had to think on how to deploy the troops with enabling units and force multipliers.

We are now in a different kind of environment with improvement in the security situation. Also, as the Mission becomes stabilized we have to take a new look at all of the military components to ensure they conform to the current prevailing security environment and that led to adjustments here and there. What we will be doing is to first enhance the protection of civilians, but also to be more effective as a force.

VoD On another topic, what is the current status of the Ceasefire Commission, of which you are the Chairman?

Nyamvumba So far, we have to acknowledge that we are behind in terms of implementation of the work of the Ceasefire Commission. We have recently concluded a week-long verification of the Liberation and Justice Movement (LJM) military dispositions. This exercise is a key element of the Doha Document for Peace in Darfur (DDPD) and aims at unlocking doors and opening up opportunities for ensuring the implementation of other phases of the agreement.

The verification is crucial in the final security arrangements of the DDPD because it determines the number of combatants and also what is required in terms of logistical support and the outcome of the exercise will subsequently be used in other phases of the agreement including demobilization and reintegration processes.

Before the verification, we held a series of meetings to tackle issues relating to the terms of reference of the Commission. We are on track. I believe this is our biggest challenge and to start with the verification exercise it will enable us to acquire adequate information towards the implementation of the DDPD.

Nyamvumba UNAMID has been confronted with numerous logistic and security challenges in its operations, as well as a shortfall in critical military transport, equipment and aviation assets. What is the situation now?

Nyamvumba Yes we have some challenges and we need mobility, but due to lack of roads, we need air assets to reach areas that are not accessible by roads. To be able to intervene on short notice we need to be able to do so by air. We do not have military helicopters. However, we are hopeful that we will receive some soon.

Some contingents do not have the full complement of equipment that they need, so we are engaging the troop-

contributing countries and the UN Headquarters in addressing this issue. At the moment that is the biggest challenge and this affects the operational performance of the troops on the ground as well as their morale, so we are appealing to the troop-contributing countries to ensure they meet the requirements of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) they signed with the UN, in order to adequately protect civilians, which is at the core of our mandate, and ensures peace and security in the region.

General Nyamvumba, who hails from Rwanda was appointed head of UNAMID's military component on 1 September 2009 and was the former Chief of Logistics of the Rwanda Defence Force.

This dynamic officer and gentleman had previously held various senior command positions in the Rwandan Army. He was the Commander of an infantry battalion, mechanized infantry regiment and infantry brigade in 1995, 1996 and 1997, respectively. Between 1998 and 1999, he served as Chief of Operations, Plans and Training. In 1999, he assumed the position of Joint Task Force Commander until his appointment as Commandant of the Military Academy in 2003. He has also served as the Commandant of the Force Preparation Centre between 2004 and 2007, and as President of the Military High Court in 2007.

"The humanitarian issue is a mandated task and we are involved in terms of contributing to easy access for humanitarian workers and the delivery of humanitarian assistance."

PHOTO BY ALBERT GONZALEZ-FARRAN





Kaltoum is an example for disabled Darfuris



PHOTOS BY ALBERT GONZALEZ-FARRAN

Lost in the conflict

STORY BY RANIA ABDULRAHMAN

Kaltoum Yakoub Eissa, 19, makes bricks for her new room in the Abu Shouk internally displaced persons (IDP) camp. Aside from being an unusual activity for a young woman, what makes it all the more extraordinary is that her hands are both twisted and maimed.

Even with her disability — one hand is gone and the fingers on the other are deformed — she has proven capable of confronting not only the physical limitations imposed by her injuries, but also the rejection by her community because of her disability and their denial of her needs.

"I am building my own room because nobody will help me," she says, as she forms the bricks that will provide her own shelter.

Ms. Eissa, her sister and father had to flee her village of Jabal Sei in North Darfur when it was attacked nine years ago, just as the war broke out. Her father later left them in El Fasher and went to Khartoum to find work. She has not heard from him since then.

"I was eleven when my village was burned down during the war, and since then the only home I know is this camp," she said. The source of the injuries that led to her disability is something she will not discuss. Ms. Eissa has no source of income and no

form of assistance. She begs in the market to get money to pay for her food and other amenities, as well as the basic materials to build her room. "My sister lives with our stepmother who allowed her to stay as she can work. As for me, I was asked to stay away from the family because I am sick, so I have to take care of myself," she added with sadness.

When the International Rescue Committee (IRC) was operating in Darfur, she was sent to Khartoum where non-governmental organizations treated her over three months and gave her a prosthetic limb. "I was very happy then because it was very useful, but now it's broken and I don't see the IRC here anymore." (The IRC left Darfur in 2009, along with other 12 international NGOs working in Darfur, following the International Criminal Court indictment of President Al Bashir.)

Ms. Eissa makes her bricks with obvious determination, as she appears to manage every challenge she faces. She is hopeful, saying, "I will manage, I know everything is going to be ok."

Many people have suffered from Darfur's conflict, and many have been neglected or forgotten. According to the latest disability statistics from the Sudan Ministry of Welfare and Social Security, in 2010, more than 26,300 disabled persons lived in North Darfur. But only 10,215

cases have received assistance from the Association for Welfare and Rehabilitation of Disabled, the only organization working for these disadvantaged persons in North Darfur.

"The Association is doing its best to assist the disabled community. However, we are lacking sufficient support in terms of equipment and qualified staff, as well as awareness of the rights of the disabled," said Mohammed Adam Ibrahim, Secretary-General of the Association. "Disabled persons are neglected by everybody including the organizations," he added, calling for more support. (UNAMID has given assistance to the Association, by building a audio-visual library and donating several wind-up radios for the blind.)

Being disabled himself was Mr. Ibrahim's biggest inspiration. "Sometimes life doesn't offer much, especially when you find yourself in the middle of a conflict, displaced and handicapped. However, it's on you to make something out of it, to stand up for yourself and be even stronger," he said, encouraging others in his community to do the same.

Carrying water and mixing clay for bricks for her own shelter but, above all, smiling with apparent hope, Ms. Eissa too provides a light in the dark for every disabled person.

A mouthpiece for development in Darfur

STORY BY EMAEDELIN RIJAL



Opinions from the local community are important for the development of Darfur

PHOTO BY ALBERT GONZALEZ-FARRAN

In Africa, radio is by far the most effective method of communication and it has the ability to influence changes in attitudes and behaviour, as well as to update knowledge, particularly in conflict-ridden areas like Darfur.

A number of societies across Africa are facing a chronic cycle of violence and poverty and only a few media outlets on the continent are using their full potential to have a positive impact on public perceptions and behaviour. Also, very few broadcasting hours on both national and local radio stations in Africa are used to promote the peaceful resolution of local, national or cross-border conflicts. Much of the time, radio broadcasts actually promote conflict by exaggerating and harping on differences, upholding stereotypes and focusing on extreme opinions rather than on the middle ground.

Audiences in conflict zones are often tired of political speeches and news reports, and they tune out and lose hope, seeking solace in radio dramas, music, local programmes and other light entertainment to keep them going.

Community radio therefore plays a vital role in building vibrant communities, in mobilizing groups to action by informing and empowering citizens, in giving voice to marginalized groups in society

and in bringing community needs to the attention of local and even national governments.

It is against this background that the programmes of the community radio project in Darfur are a strong tool for empowering rural people and building bridges to promote an interdependent mechanism for durable peace and development across the region.

"Community radio is a peace forum," stressed Hassan Omer, the community radio project coordinator in South Darfur State.

He highlighted that it strives to bring about a transformation in the lives of rural communities by upholding women and children's issues and combatting harmful practices.

Initiated by UNICEF approximately ten years ago with the purpose of keeping Darfur's rural communities informed, the project is implemented by the government-run radio stations in El Fasher (North Darfur), El-Geneina (West Darfur) and Nyala (South Darfur).

They are used as a medium for providing a voice to the voiceless and to help rural masses invoke their rights to health, education, water and sanitation, communication, information,

participation, freedom of expression, peace and security through programmes produced by members of the various communities.

"Among the objectives of this project are the promulgation of the culture of local communities and to bring the voices of rural people to the relevant actors," said Ahmed Saeidna, North Darfur's community radio coordinator.

He pointed out that the concerns of rural communities come to the ears of the appropriate bodies through well designed programmes on the radio stations.

Community radio also acts as a vehicle for creating a partnership between Darfur's communities, the UN and non-governmental organizations to promote and achieve the aims for community development. Furthermore, the impact of the community radio project has been evidenced through the provision of basic services in many rural areas across the region.

"The role of the community radio has been manifested in the construction of the first ever school and drilling of a borehole in our village," stated Adam Ali Mohammed, Chairman of the committee for developing Al-Sahil rural area in North Darfur State. He is also a programme producer.

Mohammed explained that the people of Al-Sahil village used to send their children to attend schools in remote areas. They also walked long distances to collect water.

With the growing need and collaborative efforts for an inclusive peace in Darfur, the community radio represents a platform for communication and dialogue in addition to functioning as a means to disseminate the culture of peace.

As Abdullah Ali, a resident of Gadd Al-haboob rural area in South Darfur State, who listens to community radio said, "Radio is half of peace." Abdullah, like many other listeners, explained that he usually shares what he has learnt from the radio with friends and neighbours.

Messages on peaceful coexistence and reconciliation mechanisms are among

programmes aired in West Darfur state. The radio has also begun broadcasting the contents of the Doha Document for Peace in Darfur (DDPD), which the Sudanese Government and the Liberation and Justice Movement (LJM) signed on 14 July last year.

Also, to facilitate full access to news and information for disabled persons in Darfur,

particularly through radio, UNAMID recently donated wind-up and solar-powered radio sets to representatives of disabled organizations around Darfur, including the El Fasher Association for the Disabled.

Overall, the community radio project being implemented throughout Darfur acts as a channel to identify underlying

interests, counter misperceptions and stereotyping, serve as an emotional outlet, foster consensus-building, remind listeners of a common culture and help establish and maintain accountability both in government and civil society circles. ■

Coping with the hazards of a dusty environment

STORY BY ALA MAYYAH

Haboob season is the hardest for everyone living in Darfur. It usually begins around early April ending in May or June when the rains arrive to ease the misery of this profusion of dust. The impact is not only felt by peacekeepers and humanitarian workers — to many of whom this is likely the most unpleasant and gritty experience when in Darfur — but also by the many civilians currently living in make-shift tents in internally displaced persons (IDP) camps in the region. Most of these people have no access to clean water and medical care.

A penetrating sandstorm or dust storm with violent winds occurring mainly in the Middle East, North Africa, and India, the haboob is the cause of a number of skin-related infections, and humanitarian health officials in Darfur receive many complaints of symptoms ranging from itchiness to dry skin.

According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), an estimated 1.5 to 1.7 million people live in IDP camps around Darfur and receive support from UN agencies, international and national non-governmental organizations. Many of the inhabitants have come to know the camp as their home. Despite efforts by the international community to assist the people of Darfur in providing some social services, including medical attention, many of them, particularly women and children, suffer from skin related illnesses that they have mostly caught while out in the open collecting firewood or water.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), if dust clouds are seen in the air, it is almost certain that dust in potentially hazardous proportions

is present. Yet, even if no dust cloud is visible, there may still be dangerous concentrations of dust with a particle size invisible to the naked eye under normal light. In Darfur, the impact of dust exposure can be more severe, especially in crowded areas. The WHO says a change of weather coupled with dust can be a factor for an increase in acute respiratory infections in the region.

"Catching an acute respiratory infection is highly possible in the crowded areas such as camps for internally displaced persons," said the Emergency Humanitarian Action Coordinator for WHO and State Ministry of Health in El Fasher, Dr. Muneer Matar. He suggests that staying indoors and covering the face could help prevent the disease as well as avoiding overcrowded places.

Dust should not present too much of a problem. However, exposure to large amounts of dust as one could be subject to in a place like Darfur, can be harmful due to the bacteria and viruses carried in the dust or by the dust particles themselves as they contaminate the delicate respiratory structures.

The Medical Section of the AU – UN Mission in Darfur reports that an average

of 3,000 dust-related illnesses are reported each year among staff in the Mission.

"During the haboob season, most cases we receive are dust allergies, but we also see an increase in respiratory illnesses," stated Medical Officer, Dr. Elaalia Elhussien. The Medical Section provides facial masks for the Mission's staff to use when they are outdoors.

There are also microscopic organisms, such as dust mites, which thrive in dusty indoor places. They mostly live in bedding, upholstered furniture and carpets, as well as inside window frames and humid warm places such as closed wet cabinets in kitchens and bathrooms. The particles seen floating in sunlight could include dead dust mites and their waste products. The waste products actually provoke an allergic reaction.

UNAMID and other UN agencies working in Darfur continue to assist the population in dealing with dust-related illnesses and that includes supplying clean water to communities, including to schools. The Mission's troops have also drilled boreholes in several villages in the region. ■

HEALTH

United Nations World Health Day

World Health Day is observed annually on 7 April to draw attention to particular priorities in global health.

Ageing and health was the theme of the 2012 World Health Day. Using the slogan "Good health adds life to years," campaign activities and materials focused on how maintaining good health throughout life can help older men and women lead full and productive lives and be a resource for their families and communities.

World Health organization (WHO)

<http://www.who.int/ageing/events/whd2012/en/index.html>

Tackling remnants of conflict

STORY BY SHARON LUKUNKA

On October 2011, Abdulla Ismail, a headmaster at Alfarroog primary school in Kulbus, West Darfur, was injured while ringing the school bell. "I was not aware that the bell was unexploded ordnance (UXO) until it blew up between my fingers. I was lucky, because only one finger was fractured and I sustained minor injuries on two others," he said.

"We were shocked to discover that many primary schools in Darfur have been using unexploded devices as bells," said Leon Louw, an UNAMID Ordnance Disposal Operations Officer.

The Mission, in collaboration with UN agencies and the Sudanese Ministry of Education, organized training activities for school teachers on UXO risk education. Abdulla and 39 other teachers from different areas in western Darfur attended the sessions in El Geneina. The first were held in El Geneina, Mellit, Kabkabiya and

El Fasher in North Darfur and another in Nyala, South Darfur.

"It has been proven that children are the most affected. We are trying to engage teachers and local leaders to raise awareness to stop the use of UXOs as school bells. We are working with local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) JASMAR and the Friends for Peace and Development Organization (FPDO) to train the teachers and incorporate risk education into their curriculum," said Mr. Louw.

Scrap metal is frequently used as a substitute for the traditional ringing of the school bell and some teachers even admit that they ask school children to go and collect it.

"We are in the process of procuring 500 school bells that will be distributed throughout schools in the region to prevent teachers from using unexploded devices as a substitute," said Mr. Louw.

A number of persons have been reportedly injured by UXOs in different locations in Darfur. Recent victims in the north include a 14-year-old boy from Glallab village and an 18-year-old from Tabit who both injured their hands, with the latter also sustaining injuries to his lower limbs. Even a 77-year old man was killed in Al Negia village when he came in contact with one of the devices. In the south, two boys were injured --- an 8-year-old in Khor Abeche, while a 15-year-old boy fell victim to a UXO in Sany Haya village in Mellit.

Explosive remnants of war, especially unexploded ordnance that have been fired but which did not detonate, continue to pose a significant threat to the safety of Darfuris, including displaced and returnee populations. These devices discovered in Darfur include air-delivered bombs, rockets, artillery and rifle projectiles, mortars and grenades.

Profile: Victims of unexploded ordnance in North Darfur



PHOTO BY ALBERT GONZALEZ-FARRAN

Abdulraheem Ahmed Mohammed

Twelve-year-old Abdulraheem Ahmed Mohammed, who lives in Al Salaam Camp near El Fasher town, North Darfur,

is one of the several children who have been injured as a result of unexploded ordnance (UXO). His family moved to El

Fasher from Kabkabiya more than eight years ago. Though he cannot remember the date or how old he was, the incident still lingers in his mind.

Abdulraheem was visiting his grandmother in Kabkabiya with his friend and they picked up this strange object along the road, not knowing it was dangerous. They took it home, threw it in the fire and it exploded. Abdulraheem lost his right hand, has scars on the face and also lost sight in his left eye. He is still struggling to write with his left hand. His friend was injured in the legs.

He wants to be a doctor when he grows up so that he can help other children who also fell victim to these explosives, telling them to be cautious and not touch any object lying around in the streets.

With the aim of reducing the risk of injury from UXO among the population, UNAMID's risk education programme strives to raise awareness and promote behavioural change through public information campaigns, education and training and community liaison activities. Together with Sudanese national NGOs working with the Mission, risk education is targeting schools and training of community volunteers and teachers is considered an important means to sustain risk awareness activities in schools and communities.

"Training of trainers provides a much needed platform to discuss attitudes, patterns and behaviours that the risk education programme seeks to change. With discussion, it becomes clear that the particular practice of using UXO as school bells can have undesirable effects on the school children," added Beatrice Winkler, Risk Education Coordinator.

UNAMID also continues to clear contaminated areas. The Mission was recently planning a visit to Thabit village in North Darfur to clear it of any objects and educate local inhabitants about the risks. The area was seriously affected by the conflict and, after active fighting there, unexploded devices and gun casings could be clearly seen strewn on the ground.

One of the constraints affecting the Mission's Ordnance Disposal Office is the lack of access to suspected areas as well as re-contamination of places previously cleared, after renewed clashes.

In 2010 and 2011, UNAMID and its partners conducted a general assessment which covered a total area of close to 2,000 square metres, as well as almost 10,000 kilometres of routes, marking and destroying 1,705 UXOs, including 880 small arms ammunition. About 143,000

Darfuris also benefitted from UXO risk education.

From June last year, ODO observed a decrease in incidents compared to the previous year.

UNAMID is trying to gain access to the Jebel Marra area in Central Darfur, which was another place that suffered serious consequences as a result of the conflict. "There is definitely a need for ODO to go to the area, conduct an assessment and clear areas of UXOs," stated Leon Louw.

UNAMID's Ordnance Disposal Office continues to work in support of the Mission's mandate for peace in Darfur to ensure a safe environment for the community, peacekeepers and humanitarian workers in the region.



PHOTO BY ALBERT GONZALEZ-FARRAN

Ismail Ibrahim Ahmad Baraka

Ismail Ibrahim Ahmad Baraka a 20-year old young man living in Al Salaam camp lost his arm five years ago and he has had to manage with the use of only one hand. The incident occurred in 2007 in his home

village of Eldiger in Korma locality, North Darfur, when he discovered an object, which he later found to be a grenade only when he threw it and it exploded, blowing off his right hand and leaving him

with scars on his body. His friend was also injured at the same time.

Before the accident, he helped his family to farm back home in Korma. "I can't do that anymore," he lamented.

Ismail attended Al Farook secondary school where he recently wrote his school leaving examinations. He is waiting for his results and hopes to study Pharmacology either at El Fasher or Al Jazeera University near Khartoum.

When the conflict broke out, Ismail and his family moved to Kutum and, four years ago, to El Fasher. He is now residing in Al Salaam camp with his elder brother and their mother. His father and other siblings have returned home to Korma.

His message to his peers especially children is to always report to parents and elders any suspicious items that are lying around.

The future is bright for music in Sudan

STORY BY INAJU U. INAJU



An inspiration in Darfur - Sharhabeel Ahmed performs at a peace concert

PHOTO BY ALBERT GONZALEZ-FARRAN

It is 20:45 hours on 21 February at the Al Zubir multi-purpose stadium in the township of El Fasher, North Darfur. The "Together for Peace and Development in Darfur" concert will kick off at any minute. The war-weary Darfuris are about to exhale. The air is thick with expectation even as the excitement mounts. This is a rare occasion.

Overtime, the war has made social gathering difficult in Darfur, but today is special — it is the golden jubilee of one of the oldest sports organizations in the area, one with a massive following, the Al Talia football club.

My employer, the African Union – Union Nations Mission in Darfur (UNAMID), is

sponsoring this concert to promote unity among the people of Darfur.

The star of the night is the man they call Sudan's king of jazz, Sharhabeel Ahmed. The mere mention of his name by the master of ceremonies sends shivers through the excited and expectant crowd, despite the sweltering 40-degree temperature.

When Ahmed appears on the stage, stands before the microphone and greets the crowd with "Al Salaam Alaikum" (Peace be upon you), the thunderous "Wa alaikum al Salaam" (and peace also to you) response tells that this man is indeed famous.

He said something else in Arabic that elicits an even more thunderous ovation.

Before I can ask the language assistant what he is saying, it is too late. His nimble fingers strum his guitar and the house goes silent. The melancholic solo sound of the guitar weaving its way through the labyrinth of the other musical accompaniment to track down the audience seems to take them to times before the war started.

This old man standing in front of the microphone with his grey beard, a bald head that seems to reflect the stage lights, dressed in a western suit and strumming

away at the guitar strapped across his chest, has drugged the crowd to the point of stupor within seconds with his dexterous and melodious plugging of the guitar.

There seems to be both sadness and joy in the tune. The audience is wrapped up in the banter between the lead guitarist and the three saxophonists. The banter between them is punctuated only by the bass drum that comes in now and again to tell each when to stop and listen to the other.

The audience was held spellbound, and the excitement that characterizes their behaviour earlier on is transformed and you can hear only the cry of the guitar as the saxophone tries to pacify it without success.

"This is Sharhabeel Ahmed at his best. It is not for nothing that this 76-year-old musical genius is revered," Darfur resident Sidiq Musa says. "This is live jazz, the like of which has not been heard in El Fasher for quite a while."

An elderly woman sitting next to me closes her eyes and seems to be in a trance. She is rocking from side to side on her seat. And then something happens. The old woman is crying!

"Are you ok?" I ask her. She does not speak English and I do not speak Arabic, but somehow, she understands what I mean. She opens her eyes, looks at me and then smiles. I give her a tissue.

With the help of a translator, I gather that the tune reminds her of better days when peace prevailed.

In a wicked and deft act designed to pull the audience out of their stupor, the music comes to a shattering crescendo and a crashing end. The silence is deafening and you can hear the sound of insects chirruping away in the distance.

When the audience finally recovers, their reaction is spontaneous, electrical and infectious. You can feel the palpable air of pleasure. They are standing, clicking and clapping.

But before they can catch their breath, the velvet voice of the man they call the king of jazz starts one of the most popular songs in Sudan, "Napata my love ... I wish I could stop the sandstorm from enveloping you."

The audience response is an instant surge to the dance floor. In one swift move, the audience seems to forget about the Darfur war; the tribal differences that seem to be tearing them apart. For a short while, time is frozen, as Ahmed leads them in a song of love. They all sing the chorus, sharing a nostalgic experience that brings back memories.

They raise arms and hands over their heads in the Darfuri dance style, snapping fingers in appreciation as they all wear

that rare commodity in Darfur -- a smile on their faces.

The near shy movement that passes for a dance in this part of the world is the definition of conservatism, yet this night will remain with me for a long time after my mission here is over.

"Days like these are rare," said Ahmed Malik, a national staff with UNAMID.

"Sharhabeel Ahmed may be old, but he has not lost his ability to touch our hearts with his voice and guitar," Malik noted.

Biography: Sharhabeel Ahmed, the King of Jazz

Sharhabeel Ahmed, the king of jazz in Sudan, was born in 1935 to a strict religious father. He is not only an accomplished and award-winning musician who plays multiple instruments, but he is also an actor, author, painter and cartoonist.

All of his seven children are musicians. His wife dropped her nursing career to follow him into music and became the first woman to play the guitar professionally in Sudan.

Ahmed has travelled widely within and outside his own country. In 2009, he performed at Howard University, in the United States.

He performed alongside musical greats like the late Mariam Makeba and Hugh Masekala and is a founding member of the Harambe African Art Movement in Sudan.

"My work is about making people happy. Be it painting, music, comic books or acting," he says.

The major obstacle to that goal is the environment in which he operates: "Given the level of poverty and the lack of a quality recording studio in Sudan, it is difficult to make a living as a musician," Ahmed says.

"Nor are the many wars going on at this time helping the creative environment. Our religion and politics are not helping us either," he added.

Despite this gloomy picture, Ahmed believes that "the future is bright for Sudanese music."

"We have a college of drama and music where they teach modern music. People can now write music. When we started, people just sang to melodies without harmony and songs were not written."

"It is only a matter of time before the culture of the Sudan becomes a force to reckon with again," he concluded.

Social Media - Tools for Peace and Development in Darfur

STORY BY ABDULLAHI SHUAIBU



The use of social media is fast becoming a trend in the call for peace by youth in Darfur. Twelve-year-old Abdulaziz enjoys the facilities of an internet cafe in El Fasher

PHOTO BY ALBERT GONZALEZ-FARRAN

As the peace process unfolds across Darfur, youths in the region are also playing their part in contributing to the process, as well as mobilizing efforts to ensure peaceful co-existence and a cessation of the conflict in the region.

An increasing number of young Darfuris, boys and girls alike, especially students in secondary schools and universities in the region, are now using mobile technologies to access social media tools on the Internet, including Facebook, Twitter, Skype, MySpace, YouTube and so on, to mobilize their friends and peers in the quest for peace and development.

These young men and women have begun leveraging their already extensive use of cellphones to cultivate a spiraling interest in social media – Internet-based

tools and platforms – to increase their communication with each other and with others.

In the process, they are leading what may be the next trend in communication for development: a major shift to mobile Internet use, with social media as its main drivers.

According to Hiryut Yifter, a computer programmer with the AU – UN Mission in Darfur (UNAMID), mobile Internet and social media are the fastest growing areas of technology industry worldwide and given recent trends the use of mobile Internet will soon overtake fixed Internet.

Voices of Darfur (VoD) observed that when young Darfuris go online with their mobile phones, they spend a lot of time on social

media platforms, sending and receiving e-mails, or reading news and posting messages and templates to educate, enlighten and promote the peace process and other initiatives in Darfur.

They are also using the platforms to form e-mail and Facebook groups to serve as vanguards for peace and development.

As young boys, Hassan and Hussein Hamdan, teenage twins living in El Fasher, learned about Facebook from their friends, saying, "Our childhood friends created a Facebook page where all our friends could post messages and put up picture albums for everyone to view and comment on. We are enjoying and using our Facebook profiles, to link up with fellow students in our secondary school and with schools and friends in other parts of the world

to call for peace and development in our region," they told VoD.

They also cited some of the recently created Facebook groups by their friends to include "ndefasheer@groups.fac", "Youths for Darfur Peace", "Team Darfur" and "Save Darfur Coalition", all with the singular goal of mobilizing support for the people of Darfur, and to campaign and advocate for peace.

Also, Ahmad Adam, a fourth-year medical student at El Fasher University in North Darfur, said he joined the social media trend with the aim of establishing a community-based group via the Internet to promote Sudanese culture and traditions, and to explore durable solutions to peace and foster partnerships for the growth of the region.

Adam said his group's page had generated more than 2,000 followers from Sudan, other African countries, Europe and the United States who send a strong message urging the various armed movements in the region to agree to a common negotiating position so as to facilitate final agreement with the Sudanese government and mediators.

On his part, Abdulaziz Abdallah, a 12-year-old secondary school boy, who was seen busy at an Internet cafe in El Fasher town, said he used the Internet, more especially the websites of Facebook, Skype and Yahoo Messenger, to communicate with his relatives and friends in Kassala, Nyala, El Fasher and Khartoum.

"I am enjoying my time on the Internet and I am using it to make friends and keep in touch with them. It is fun every day as it keeps me busy and out of trouble," Abdallah said.

Speaking in similar vein, Sherihan Mohammed, a medical student at El Fasher University, said, "The use of social media has enabled me to help in enlightening my friends and fellow students on the need to work for peace in our region."

"We commend Facebook for launching versions in Arabic and other major African languages, including Swahili and Hausa, to help us communicate online with friends sharing similar aspirations," she said.

Furthermore, she said that she and her friends were using social media to

specifically draw attention to concerns of Darfuri women.

"We also want to write about Darfur's culture in general, including its social traditions. But we want to target youth through these platforms hoping that these postings will help raise their awareness and motivate them to take positive steps to combat some wrong practices, such as violence against women. We wish to provide educational reports on general issues such as healthcare, technology, environment, sports, and social well-being to enhance living standards," Sherihan stated.

Moreover, she added, "We also hope to revitalize the peace process because we are the future of Darfur."

As future leaders, what Sherihan and her friends are doing with social media will surely resonate with the estimated 18 million Africans made up of mostly young people on Facebook, thereby expanding the potential of social media to tackle social problems that are plaguing the continent.

Unlike the mainstream media, social media have become such powerful tools because of their accessibility (you only need Internet connection), usability (no special skills required), immediacy (feedback is instantaneous) and reach (because it is highly decentralized and lacks any hierarchy).

Mayad Suleman, another student, noted that Facebook "allows people to interact and share knowledge by asking and answering questions instantly on local or regional interest."

"We are happy that the social media platforms are helping us to motivate young people and other big brothers and sisters to participate in developing our society into one that would be free of violence and conflicts," she said.

Media outlets -- radio, television and newspapers in Sudan as in many other countries around the world, have embraced various social media platforms to interact with their listeners and readers who also contribute by either posting on their Facebook pages, uploading video on YouTube accounts or follow on Twitter.

Whilst everyone acknowledges the potential of social media to drive

change, mobilize youths, sustain development initiatives and generally promote interaction across the various demographic groups, the constraints to their use remain enormous.

For one, the use of the Internet to access the social media platforms is inhibited by inaccessibility and high costs of broadband connections (the fastest means of accessing the Internet), the limited number of computers in use, as well as poor wireless connections.

Mr. Fath El-Rahman Awad, the owner of El-Bakri Internet Cafe, one of the few business centers in the heart of El Fasher, said, "Business is good and booming as many young people patronize the café to browse the Internet. But our problem is electricity and connectivity problems and this sometimes affects the turnout of our patrons." Awad is also a final year medical student at El Fasher University.

This is not surprising given the fact that Africa accounts for only four per cent of the world's electricity. In spite of this constraint, however, given the role played by social media in the recent political upheavals in North Africa and the Middle East, it demonstrates that life will never be same again especially for the youths of Darfur and the rest of Africa.

As Awad noted, "the mobile Web is beginning to take over our business and also reshaping the economic, political and social growth and development of the region."

Founded in 2004, Facebook helps individuals communicate more efficiently with friends, family, and co-workers. "Anyone can sign up for Facebook and interact with the people they know in a trusted environment," the medium says. This, perhaps, accounts for its attraction, particularly for the young.

By June 2011, it was estimated that there were 750 million users of this medium, just as YouTube has been adjudged as the third most popular website on the Internet with an estimated two billion (video) views per day.



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