

UNAMID's publication for the people of Darfur

VOICES

of Darfur

SEPTEMBER 2011

**STRENGTHENING THE PROTECTIVE
ENVIRONMENT FOR CHILDREN**

**THE RECONCILIATION COMMISSION OF THE
DARFUR REGIONAL AUTHORITY CONTINUES
TO PUSH FOR PEACE**



AFRICAN UNION - UNITED NATIONS
MISSION IN DARFUR
(UNAMID)

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of Darfur

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AUGUST AT A GLANCE



AUGUST 01 Foreign Minister of Burkina Faso and former Joint Chief Mediator for Darfur, Djibrill Bassolé, visits his country's troops stationed in UNAMID Team Site at Foro Baranga, approximately 150 km south of El Geneina, West Darfur. He is briefed on their activities on the ground and the security situation in the area and encourages them to continue with their good work. Mr. Bassolé reiterates his commitment to help in bringing peace to Darfur, stating that the outcome at the Doha stakeholders conference is not the end. "There will not be a comprehensive peace agreement without the participation of all movements. We need all parties to make a peace deal based on the Doha Darfur Peace Document," he said.

AUGUST 05 A UNAMID peacekeeper is killed and a second seriously injured when their vehicle carrying five troops is attacked by four gunmen in Duma Village, 37 kilometres northeast of Nyala in South Darfur. "The attack on our peacekeepers is deplorable and our hearts go out to the families and friends of the deceased," said UNAMID Deputy Joint Special Representative (Political) Aïchatou Mindaoudou Souleymane. "UNAMID is doing all it can to render treatment to the injured, and, with the Sudanese police, to find the perpetrators and bring them to justice."

AUGUST 07 An inter-agency mission composed of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the World Health Organization (WHO), the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), Danish Refugee Council and UNAMID deliver humanitarian relief to Jebel Marra, West Darfur.

AUGUST 09 The UNAMID South African contingent based in Kutum, North Darfur, celebrate their national women's day recalling the massive, women-led protest on 9 August, 1956 in Pretoria to end the pass book system, which was used during apartheid. Of the 457 South African troops based in North Darfur, 130 are women.

AUGUST 10 UNAMID, through its quick impact projects programme, funds the construction of two classrooms and a fence for the El Wadi Primary School in Saraf Omra, North Darfur. The center is a new basic school for girls which will allow 500 girls to transfer from distant and overcrowded schools to the new facility near to their homes. The project was also intended to help girls' education in Saraf Omra, since the locality scored the second best examination results of the state of North Darfur. The school will be complemented with the construction of two additional classrooms and an office for teachers, financed by the Government of North Darfur.

AUGUST 11 Joint Special Representative (JSR) Ibrahim Gambari briefs UNAMID staff stating that the sovereignty and integrity of the Sudan will be fully respected while implementing the UNAMID mandate. Mr. Gambari updates staff on meetings he held with Government officials in Khartoum on 9 and 10 August where they discussed the latest Security Council resolution (2003) which continued the UNAMID mandate from 31 July 2011 to 31 July 2012, recent UNAMID activities including his recent visit to Doha to meet with the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) and the Qatari Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, in his capacity as Joint Chief Mediator, ad interim, for the Darfur peace process. The JSR notes with concern the increased number of peacekeepers being attacked and killed in the course of their duties, and calls on the Sudanese Government to do its utmost to bring the perpetrators to justice.



AUGUST 15 Dutch Special Envoy for the Sudan, Desiree Bonis, accompanied by the Ambassador of the Netherlands in Khartoum, arrives in El Fasher, North Darfur, for a two-day visit to the region. The delegation is welcomed by UNAMID's Joint Special Representative, Ibrahim Gambari, at the Mission's headquarters and holds meetings with UNAMID senior officials, UN Agencies, humanitarian workers and civil society

organizations. This trip marks the first visit of Ms. Bonis to the Sudan, during which she hopes to gain first-hand knowledge of the security and humanitarian situation in Darfur, the peace process and the work of UNAMID in the field.

AUGUST 15 An international aid worker with for an international non-governmental organization is kidnapped in Nyala, South Darfur. The victim was in a car with two Sudanese colleagues driving to the airport when four unidentified armed men, dressed in civilian clothes, stopped them. The perpetrators forced all occupants out of the vehicle and took the International staff member, an Italian, with them. The local authorities are investigating the case.

AUGUST 18 UNAMID Joint Special Representative (JSR) Ibrahim Gambari visits Addis Ababa for consultations with the AU Chairperson, Jean Ping and the Commissioner for Peace and Security at the AUC, Ramtane Lamamra on 16 and 17 August 2011. During their meeting, the JSR briefs on recent developments on Darfur including ongoing plans to support implementation of the agreement signed by the Government of the Sudan and the Liberation and Justice Movement (LJM), continue engagement with other stakeholders and status of plans for the implementation of the Darfur-based Political Process (DPP).

Mr. Gambari also agrees with Commissioner that a workshop of the African Union (AU), United Nations (UN) and UNAMID should be convened urgently to outline a strategy for the next steps for both the Doha Document for Peace in Darfur and the DPP in order to enhance coordination and synergy between the AU and UN on these matters.

AUGUST 22 UNAMID Joint Special Representative (JSR) Ibrahim Gambari opens the inaugural meeting of the Ceasefire Commission (CFC), chaired by Force Commander Lieutenant General Patrick Nyamvumba, and bringing together senior representatives of the Sudanese military and Government, the LJM and UNAMID. The CFC's functions are critical to implementation of the provisions of the DDPD, and ultimately the permanent ceasefire and final security arrangements.

The next meeting is scheduled for September 8, 2011 to build on the momentum of the inaugural session.

Darfuri women sing for peace

BY DANIEL ADEKERA



Hakkamat singers perform at a UNAMID sponsored event in Nyala, South Darfur

PHOTOS OLIVIER CHASSOT

Traditional songs and poetry have always formed an integral part of the rich African cultural heritage. People who are gifted in the art of composing are venerated by the society as custodians and preservers of a community's history, often reciting acts of bravery and victories in battles.

Darfur, a region which has experienced numerous localized conflicts in the past, has singers known as Hakkamat. These women sing at important local occasions such as cultural festivals, visits of dignitaries or the coronation of a traditional ruler. The presence and performances by Hakkamat singers at any occasion automatically accords the event a high status.

They are found predominantly in the South Darfur and Kordofan areas, although each community boasts of its Hakkamat singers. Presently, in South Darfur, over 60 groups are registered with the general association

for local arts and heritage. Their traditional costumes reflect the type of occasion in which they are participating. These range from simple to heavily ornamented dresses, which signify the status of the particular Hakkamat group. Their poetry and songs, which could be situational or event-specific, mainly focus on conflict, an explanation of the prevalence of so many Hakkamat groups in the war-torn region of Darfur.

Because of the influence of Hakkamat singers on the society, it is widely believed that they have fuelled localized conflicts in Darfur in the past as they have traditionally specialized in eulogizing the bravery of the combatants and urging them to exploit this by defeating their enemies. The singers chronicled the great battles fought and won by their forefathers and asked rhetorically whether such acts of bravery had been buried with their ancestors. Sometimes they insinuated in their poetry that all 'men' in the community

had died, leaving only 'women', which is why another community had come to provoke them. If the men wanted to prove that they were manly, then they would have to fight off the invaders.

But, those were earlier days when meeting violence with violence was celebrated as a virtue. Things have changed dramatically in Darfur since the search for sustainable peace and security began.

According to Huda Rahmaullah, one of the famous Hakkamat singers residing in Nyala, South Darfur, "the music has changed, and so we have also changed our dancing steps." This change is connected with the clarion call by the African Union-United Nations Mission in Darfur (UNAMID) for all people and organizations in Darfur to join hands in the search for durable peace in the region. The change in tone is also due to the discovery by Hakkamat singers that their talents of singing and poetry should be used as an asset and not a liability to

the people of Darfur. This simply means that the Hakkamat have now seen reason to join in the search for sustainable peace and security in Darfur. They are now “beating their swords into ploughshares, and spears into pruning hooks.” Rather than singing for war, they have now chosen to sing for peace. The songs and poems that once beat war drums have now become a mobilizing theme for peace and development in Darfur. Old songs and poems portraying violence as a virtue to be bequeathed to the young generation have now given way to new ones that promote a culture of peace and good neighborliness as indices of a decent society. Fatma Alghali Attigani now sees the Hakkamat singer as “one who sings for all and advocates for unity”.

For the Hakkamat singers, the search for peace in Darfur should have both short and long-term perspectives. Consequently, the Hakkamat singers are now mentoring younger ones on how to

use their talents for the benefit of society. They have invaded schools and religious organizations, sensitizing and educating children and women to embrace the culture of peace and therefore resolution of conflict. They have also contributed to the reconciliation exercises between the different warring groups such as the Fallata and Habbania as well as the Trajam and Rizegat tribes in South Darfur. At the insistence of the native administration, the organizers of a reconciliation exercise, Hakkamat women singers were brought in to appeal to warring tribes through their songs to “sheath swords and embrace peace”. The songs pleaded with the tribal leaders to reflect on the days when they all ate from one plate with bonds of inter-tribal marriages as an indication that they had more in common than hatred for one another. The leaders were touched by the emotion-laden songs which succeeded in making them call on the youth in their various areas to cease hostilities towards one another and embrace negotiations as a

way of settling disputes instead of violence.

“We are singing for peace and we want to stop people from using arms and refrain from violence so that everyone can begin to enjoy the benefits of peace and stability,” announced one of the popular Hakkamat singers.

Recognizing the valuable contribution of Hakkamat singers to the search for a negotiated peace in Darfur, UNAMID has engaged them in various activities. One instance was a horse racing competition sponsored by the Mission’s office in Nyala where Hakkamat singers featured prominently. Also, several Hakkamat singers have met with rebel movements to dissuade them from fighting. This underscores the commitment of the Hakkamat singers to turn conflict around and be builders of their communities. ■

Hakkamat singers in Nyala are accompanied by a local musician



Darfur's youth look toward a better future

BY GUIOMAR PAU



Yusra Suleiman Al-Toum Ahmed

PHOTO: ALBERT GONZALEZ FARRAN

Only 16 years old, Yusra Suleiman Al-Toum Ahmed is a Sudanese teenager, exuding the potential of her generation. She wants to become a journalist, to explain the problems that children, youth and students are facing in Darfur.

"I would like to reflect the good talents that young Darfuris have. They are ambitious, willing to help themselves and their families, but the problem is that they lack awareness," she notes.

Around the world, young people are planning and hoping for a better future, while they contribute to transforming their reality. In Darfur, where the conflict has undermined the optimism of many, they still believe and dream of a future with more opportunities for everybody.

From Yusra's point of view, young people should have more options, such as capacity-building programmes, and in their spare time they should practice hobbies and upgrade their skills. They should also "look to the future, not only to the present".

Her engagement with her community begins at her school, Al Manar, in El Fasher,

North Darfur. She is a member of the students union and head of the Koranic association. During breaks between lessons, both organizations conduct activities for the students, such as meetings and debates by external lecturers. They also improve the school environment by painting walls, among other activities and engage in conflict resolution among students. Yusra was also a member of the North Darfur youth parliament. In her opinion, it was a good initiative to improve the abilities and talents of children who received training in parliamentary procedures as well as of rules and formalities of governance.

Even though Yusra doesn't want to become a politician, she says if she were a decision-maker, she would establish internet cafes so youth could have access to computers and the internet, and would open libraries and organize debates to fill the free time of young people. "These activities would help to develop their skills. Children and youth have too much time off, and this is a real problem. Many violations are committed by youth due to this." She would also construct sports facilities for girls, as currently, in Darfur, they only exist for boys. This is not the only discrimination that girls are facing, she says. At university level, disappointingly,

girls are not allowed to enroll in the same faculties as boys.

Yusra realizes that youth in Darfur have fewer possibilities to develop themselves than those in other parts of the world, especially in the education field. "To some extent, the school environment is not conducive. We don't have libraries, and there is a lack of teachers, both in terms of numbers and quality."

If she had the chance to study abroad she would jump at it but she maintains that after receiving her education, she would return to the Sudan to serve her country. She is so proud of it.

"The media have presented a very bad image of Darfur to the world, just the killings and the destruction, but Darfur is a beautiful area. People are kind and I believe that it can have a bright future. The war is a black spot. If we manage to clean it, that will be great for the area," she says

She is optimistic and hopes that Darfur will soon live in peace. "The people of Darfur have to stop war, stop tribal clashes and collect arms from the people." Yusra encourages her community to work harder for development, and set up projects so that all Sudan could benefit from the progress made. "The only way to the development of the region is peace, not war," she remarks. "I believe that the presence of UNAMID is a positive step. Since its arrival, the situation is better in Darfur. UNAMID plays a significant role."

Her thoughts are also transformed into words. She writes poems, and one of them won the Sudanese National School Competition in 2008. She says that people should live for art and poetry and put aside sorrows and grievances.

In 20 years, she imagines herself as a university graduate, and a good journalist intent on solving the problems of children and young people. She would like to have a big family, although this would not stop her from continuing with her professional career. "I want to be a working mother. I would like to have a job as a journalist and take care of my family too," she says.

Finally, she hopes that "there will be peace in Darfur -- it will be magnificently beautiful, free from wars, and there will be no internally displaced people. The region will not claim that it is marginalized. People will enjoy life in Darfur."



Internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Darfur

PHOTO: ALBERT GONZALEZ FARRAN

The Reconciliation Commission of the Darfur Regional Authority continues to push for peace

BY MUNTASIR SHARAFADIN AND EMADELDIN RIJAL

In an interview with UNAMID Radio, the Chairman of Peace and Reconciliation Commission at the Darfur Regional Authority (DRA) in West Darfur State, Assad Abdulrahman Bahreldin, outlined the aims of this Commission. The DRA is a successor of the Transitional Darfur Regional Authority (TDRA) which was established under the Darfur Peace Agreement signed in Abuja in 2006. The DRA was established under the terms of last June's peace talks in Doha.

Among others, those aims include facilitating reconciliation and re-establishing social relationships between groups that have been affected by the conflict in Darfur.

"Since its establishment, the Commission has been in contact with people in their various villages with the purpose of disseminating peace messages. And this springs from the fact that both security and stability are fundamental needs of human beings," said Assad Bahreldin. The Commission also strives to inculcate confidence among Darfuris.

In this respect, Mr. Bahreldin hopes that the upcoming period will see a further engagement in peace and development

programmes that could help restore the Darfuri population to their former era and stressed the importance of achieving peace at the grassroots as well as at the level of leadership. He also expressed his hope that the terms -- internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees -- would one day be replaced so these persons could feel a sense of citizenship and enjoy at the very least basic human rights according to international standards. Moreover, the return of the IDPs to their villages would greatly assist in their enjoyment of a normal life in a secure and stable environment.

The Commission had also played a bigger role in protecting the agricultural lands and crop harvesting in coordination with official bodies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the native administrations by establishing crop harvesting protection committees. In that light, he acknowledged the role of these committees in protecting agricultural holdings, disputes for which have been at the root cause of the conflict in Darfur, in support of the peace process.

Referring to the contributions made by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the African

Union-United Nations Mission in Darfur (UNAMID), the Sudanese Government and several NGOs to support the Commission's work, he stated that it continued to experience challenges in its undertaking, including lack of funding and transport, especially to hard to reach areas. He further noted that UNAMID had facilitated the establishment of seven halls and offices for native administrations at a number of localities in West Darfur State to enhance peace programmes and capacity building exercises for native administration leaders.

Mr. Bahreldin used the opportunity to call on the Government, armed movements and the people of Darfur to work together. For sustainable peace and development, all Darfuris, including those in West Darfur State, must have access to agricultural resources, education, particularly of women, and health services. Therefore, all stakeholders in the peace and reconciliation process needed to collaborate in push forward for peace in Darfur.



UNAMID supports strengthening the protective environment for children in armed conflict

BY ALA MAYYAH

Since children are among the most affected groups in conflicts, UNAMID gives high consideration to the issues of child rights and child protection. As part of its core mandate, UNAMID's Child Protection Unit (CPU) conducts various activities aiming at supporting the children of Darfur to have a safer environment. The unit follows up on the implementation of the eight Security Council resolutions on children and armed conflict and the relevant provisions of Sudan country-specific resolutions on Darfur.

In order to ensure that the rights and well-being of children in armed conflict are protected, a child protection team

works in collaboration with the parties to the conflict as well as with Darfur communities, the UN country team and international non-governmental organizations.

"We do our best to ensure that the noble mandate of the Security Council pertaining to children and armed conflict is effectively implemented and will continue to promote local ownership of the protection agenda of children in anticipation of UNAMID's exit strategy from a peaceful Darfur," said Head of the unit, Boubacar Dieng. "Our job is not easy. We face many challenges while implementing the mandate. However we are persistent and do receive valuable collaboration and support from the parties to

the conflict and communities in our efforts to contribute to the strengthening of a well deserved protective environment for the children of Sudan."

The Child Protection Unit provides advocacy for the integration of children's concerns into the peace process and peace agreements as well as in post-conflict recovery and reconstruction planning and programmes. The unit also extends capacity-building and training on child rights and child protection for government institutions; community groups, civil societies and armed groups.

During the last year, the unit training programme benefited 1,193 national partners



far left. UNAMID Peacekeepers and members of community discussing children's concerns in Kabkabiya. UNAMID conducts regular outreach exercises to prevent re-recruitment of child soldiers

left. IDPs after an awareness raising session on child soldier recruitment

PHOTOS CHILD PROTECTION UNIT

In this respect, the SLA/Free Will movement reiterated its commitment to end the use of child soldiers during a recent meeting with CPU. The movement has released over 173 child soldiers from its forces since 2009, and its current plan is to identify, register and release all remaining children associated in their forces throughout the region.

"We are committed and determined to continue working on freeing all our forces from children, and end all kind of child recruitment, in line with the international principles and guidelines of Paris and Cape Town on the prevention of child recruitment in armed forces," said Abulla Musa, one of the SLA/Free Will representatives in the meeting with CPU.

In addition, the unit, in collaboration with UNICEF and partners, established a monitoring and reporting mechanism working group in the three states of Darfur to strengthen monitoring of grave violations against children and encourage prompt action at the local level to address these violations and put in place preventive mechanisms. The interventions of UN agencies and NGOs to assist child victims, complementing the substantial efforts of the national institutions, have been crucial.

Mainstreaming children's concerns across other components of UNAMID is part of CPU activities, including providing capacity-building and training sessions on child rights and child protection for all newly-deployed peacekeepers to the Mission, whether they are civilian or military. Since the beginning of the year, 2,146 peacekeepers and associated personnel benefited from training on child rights and child protection. Thus, exemplary behavior by all peacekeepers towards children is encouraged. In addition, Joint Special Representative Ibrahim Gambari and his deputies are ensuring the effective intervention on concerns identified as critical for the protection of children in conflict.

including 417 women and 776 men in the three states of Darfur. In addition, the unit enters into dialogue with the parties to the conflict for commitments to time-bound action plans to end recruitment and use of child soldiers, as well as other grave violations against children. As a result, increased awareness has been created among the target groups.

It is encouraging to witness that in Darfur the armed forces and armed groups are committing to action plans to end recruitment of children, re-recruitment and association with children. Armed groups are also issuing command orders calling upon their members to refrain from using children as soldiers.

"An end to use of the child soldier is the recipe for a sustainable lasting peace in Darfur, in the rest of Sudan, and in the sub-region," added Mr. Dieng. "We shall continue to work in close collaboration

with the armed forces as partners for a life-long peace dividend. The establishment of a North Sudan Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) Commission to support the registration and reintegration of children assisted by UN and partners has been extremely helpful. The advocacy for greater resource allocation to benefit children affected by the conflict in Darfur must continue."

In his annual Report to the Security Council on Children and Armed Conflict in the Sudan (5 July 2011), the UN Secretary-General confirmed that "from February 2009 to February 2011, the Northern Sudan DDR Commission, with the support of the United Nations, registered 1,041 former child soldiers in Darfur." The Secretary-General commended the progress registered and called upon all armed forces and armed groups to establish and implement time-bound action plans to end recruitment and use of child soldiers.



UNAMID peacekeepers provide medical relief to North Darfur communities

BY SHARON LUKUNKA

To ensure protection of civilians and to facilitate humanitarian assistance, UNAMID conducted a seven-day humanitarian exercise in August in North Darfur aimed at providing medical assistance to the local population.

The operation dubbed "Operation Haboob Chase II" was an initiative of UNAMID Force Commander Lt. Gen Patrick Nyamvumba. It was planned and conducted by the Nepalese Special Forces with support from the Mongolian Level II Hospital and Rwandan protection forces and medical personnel. The teams delivered medical assistance to residents of Gurrav Farvaj village located about 40 kilometers northwest of Kabkabiya as well as Kuma, Dar al Salaam and Shangil Tobaya in North Darfur.

More than 2,000 people including women and children received treatment for various illnesses including eye and



left. A Mongolian peacekeeper examines a young boy during the medical outreach programme (Haboob Chase II)

right. One of the centres set up by UNAMID during the seven-day medical relief campaign in north Darfur

PHOTOS OLIVIER CHASSOT

ear infections, cardiovascular illnesses, hypertension, abdominal disorders, and dental and skin infections.

The operation was part of several efforts by UNAMID to address the needs of local populations affected by conflict, intended as well to strengthen relations between UNAMID and the host communities.

Khaltoum Djibril Ahmad Musa, a woman from Shangil Tobaya and her mother Halima Ahmad Adam were among those who came to the medical camp for help. Khaltoum complained of a skin infection while her mother had chest pains.

Mohammad Abdulrahman, 45, said he was suffering from a backache and high blood pressure.

"We are trying to help the community as much as we can," said Lt Col. Togtmol Sukhbaatar, of the Mongolian Level II hospital.

"The aim of the mission was to practice a joint exercise with different troops in Darfur, humanitarians and other UN agencies," said Maj. Bishwonath Timilsina, a Nepalese operations officer.

The mission illustrates the continuing enhancement of UNAMID's capabilities targeting Darfuris, humanitarian agencies and UNAMID.

The UNAMID Force Commander accompanied the teams to Gurrav Farjawi village and Dar al Salaam where he interacted with the local community, informing them that the Mission will launch similar programmes in other areas in the future. Operation Haboob Chase is the second exercise conducted by the Nepalese forces, after a nine-day long-range patrol undertaken last August over almost 1,100 kilometers in North and West Darfur in order to make possible critical and often

elusive access for the local populations to various services.

Addressing the troops in Shangil Tobaya, UNAMID Sector North Commander Brig. Gen. Sithabiso Mahlobo commended the troops for their actions: "This exercise is the beginning of realizing the importance of why we are here, ensuring the substance and importance of our engagement in promoting peace in Darfur," he said.

The protection of civilians is part of UNAMID's core mandate, but the mission is also tasked with contributing to security for humanitarian assistance and it continues to work with all relevant stakeholders in the region to promote peace.





Healing Darfuri Communities (Haboob Chase II)

PHOTOS BY OLIVIER CHASSOT

More than 2,000 individuals including women and children received medical treatment provided by UNAMID's Nepalese Special Forces, Mongolian Level II hospital and Rwandese protection force and medical personnel during a seven-day medical campaign. They were treated for various illnesses including eye and ear infection, cardiovascular illnesses, hyper tension, abdominal pains, dental care, skin infection and other minor illnesses.

Operation Haboob Chase is the second exercise conducted by the Nepalese forces, after a nine-day extended long range patrol undertaken last August covering a distance of almost 1,100 kilometers around parts of North and West Darfur to provide critical and often elusive access to various social and medical services.



left. A UNAMID peacekeeper dispenses medication to women during Haboob Chase II

top right. A Rwandese peacekeeper examines a baby

middle right. Darfuri women wait on line to be seen by medical personnel

bottom right. men and boys also wait in a separate area to be seen by UNAMID medical personnel

Interview with the Darfuri Poet Al-Safy Saleh Al-Noor

BY ALA MAYYAH

Writing poems for peace, Al-Safy Saleh Al-Noor became one of the most well-considered poets in Darfur. Many of his poems have been published in Sudanese newspapers, while several regional TV channels have interviewed him, including Al Jazeera, Al Shorouq and Al Nile.

Mr. Al-Safy is originally from the Koubiyeh area (which was the trading capital of Darfur during the Sultans era). He has lived in El Fasher, North Darfur, since 2000 when he came to study at El Fasher University and specialized in the Arabic language.

"Voices of Darfur" interviewed him on his poems on peace and coexistence, among other topics.

VoD: Mr. Al-Safy, tell us about your poems through which you promote peace in Darfur.

Al-Safy: Firstly, I would like to say that we as poets use the word as our only weapon. I used to write in formal Arabic, but after the outbreak of conflict in 2003, I started writing in the local dialect using Darfuri words so that I can reach all Darfuris including those who do not use formal Arabic. I wrote my first poem for peace in 2004 titled "We want our peace." It was a big success and I read it in many interviews in radio stations and TV channels.

VoD: Would you read for us some of it?

Al-Safy:

*We want our peace rightly be done
Each man to do as best as he can
A kind word can affect even a snake
Good talk is like cold water
Which would makes its jug to break*

(The translation of the poem is a reflection of the meaning of the original Darfuri words).

VoD: And how do you see Darfuris' interest in poetry?

Al-Safy: Darfuris like poetry a lot, especially in the common dialect. They read it

and memorize it. Even the government institutions appreciate poetry. I was invited several times to official occasions and events related to peace to read some of my poems that serve peace in Darfur.

VoD: Tell us about your experience in writing songs.

Al – Safy: I wrote poems for many Darfuri singers such as Al Mahi Husain, Abdul RahmanJidu and Umar Arbab. I also wrote for an album produced by the Council of Development through the Cultural Reality, and 5,000 copies were distributed among Darfuris for free. Two other poets participated as well in this album, Mohamed Al Amin Al Tijani, who is known as “Sika” and “Nathariya,” a student at El Fasher University. The songs were composed by Fathi Abdul Rahman and sung by Fathi Al Mahi. People here like these songs a lot. One of the singers for whom I wrote the lyrics for a song, told me that when he performed this song in Abu Shouk camp for internally displaced persons (IDPs), the audience liked the song so much that they cried and asked him three times to sing it all again.

VoD: What other issues did you write about?

Al-Safy: I wrote about Darfuri women and their strength and role as they handle almost all responsibilities inside and outside the house. The woman in our society is like an umbrella that brings under its shade all family members, even the relatives and neighbors. She is an essential element for the family union. I wrote also about my beloved country the Sudan as well as about the IDPs suffering. One of them is titled “Scattered we became”, and here are some parts of it:

*Our war is horrible
it has fanned its flames
once we were united
but scattered we became
from home we migrated
like guests we settle
come on my people
gather all neighbors
unite all the tribes
to throw out the devil
to live in our villages
in our home the Sudan*

Al Safy Saleh Al Noor in front of a small community outside of UNAMID's El Fasher Headquarters

VoD: Beside writing poetry, do you have other artistic talents?

Al-Safy: Yes, I draw Arabic fonts, and I held an exhibition in 2002 of my art work of Arabic fonts showing the beauty of this art.

VoD: How actively are Darfuri writers and poets participating in promoting peace among people?

Al-Safy: Actually, we have very good writers and poets who can contribute actively to the peace process, but we don't have a union of writers in Darfur through which literary works and activities could be well supported to keep them ongoing and effective in promoting peace.

VoD: What message do you like today to deliver through Voices of Darfur?

Al-Safy: I urge all Darfuris to go towards peace because through peace only can they achieve all their hopes for development, stability and prosperity. ■

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