

UNAMID's publication for the people of Darfur

VOICES

of Darfur

FEBRUARY 2011



**OFFERING A BETTER FUTURE
FOR STREET CHILDREN**

**OPTIMISTIC AND REBUILDING
THEIR COMMUNITY**

**ACTION AGAINST
POLIO IN DARFUR**



AFRICAN UNION - UNITED NATIONS
MISSION IN DARFUR
(UNAMID)

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Street children at school in El Fasher

Front Cover Photo by Olivier Chassot



Returnee children in Sullu

Back Cover Photo by Albert Gonzalez Farran



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JANUARY 05 A UNAMID international civilian staff member and Hungarian national, Istvan Papp, who was abducted from his accommodation in El Fasher on 7 October, is freed after 90 days in captivity. He underwent a medical examination and was in good health. Since the beginning of the Mission in 2008, ten UNAMID peacekeepers have been abducted.



JANUARY 07 A delegation led by United States Senator and Chairman of the US Senate's Foreign Relations Committee, John Kerry, arrives in El Fasher, North Darfur. He addresses the thousands of IDPs sheltered outside the Mission team site in Shangil Tobaya, following recent clashes in the area last December.



JANUARY 09 Voting begins in Darfur. An estimated 23,000 people are registered to vote on the referendum. UNAMID ensured the speedy transportation of polling materials and peaceful completion of the voting process.

JANUARY 10 UNAMID Joint Special Representative (JSR) Ibrahim Gambari meets local authorities and internally displaced persons (IDPs), and Mission staff in Nyala and Khor Abeche in South Darfur. He states that peacekeepers will do everything in their power to assist the IDPs.

JANUARY 11 The Chairman of the UN Secretary-General's Panel on the Referendum and former President of the Republic of Tanzania, Mr. Benjamin Mkapa, visits Nyala in South Sudan. He expresses his satisfaction with the peaceful conduct of the referendum and hopes that the outcome will be accepted by all.

JANUARY AT A GLANCE



JANUARY 13 US Special Envoy for Sudan, Scott Gration, accompanied by US Senior Advisor on Darfur, Dane Smith, concludes a two-day visit to Darfur. He was briefed by UNAMID leadership on the latest developments in the peace process, as well as on the current security situation.

JANUARY 18 Following the stoning of a Central Reserve Police convoy in El Fasher, North Darfur, officers enter a high school in search of those responsible. On entry, shots are fired. The action resulted in more rocks being thrown, leaving three students injured.

UNAMID senior officials attend a signing ceremony of a peace pact between Sudan Liberation Army/Historic, a breakaway faction of Sudan Liberation Army/Abdul Wahid, and the Government of the Sudan in Bali Siref, village located at the northern edge of the Jebel Marra mountains. The Mission also provided logistical support for the event, airlifting some of the participants.

JANUARY 21 Nearly one hundred children associated with armed movements are registered in El Fasher, North Darfur, in a voluntary exercise conducted by the state's Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) Commission, UNAMID, UNICEF and the African Charitable Society for Motherhood and Child Care.

JANUARY 23 A cordon-and-search operation in Zam Zam camp conducted by a joint Sudanese military and police operation results in the arrest of thirty-seven individuals, ten 4x4 vehicles impounded, and seizure of three assault rifle magazines, unspecified quantities of ammunition, suspected stolen goods and illegal substances.



JANUARY 24 JSR Gambari visits peacekeepers in El Geneina, Forobaranga and Zalingei in West Darfur where he is briefed on the Mission's activities in both areas. The JSR, accompanied by UN Resident Coordinator, and Humanitarian Coordinator, Georg Charpentier, meets with the Wali (Governor) of West Darfur and the state's security committee. He also visits the Um al-Mumineen School in Forobaranga, which was rehabilitated by UNAMID peacekeepers.

JANUARY 25 UNAMID reports on the latest outbreak of violence, which began on 24 January, between the Sudanese Armed Forces and Sudan Liberation Army/Minni Minnawi movement in Tabit, located approximately 45 km south of El Fasher, which began on 24 January.

JANUARY 29 Ambassador Ki Doulaye Coentien of Burkina Faso assumes duty as UNAMID's new acting Deputy Joint Special Representative (DJSR).



Optimistic and rebuilding their community

Returnees from Kalma camp - a ray of hope for thousands of displaced people

BY SHARON LUKUNKA

Seven years ago, the residents of Sullu village, located approximately 60 kilometers west of El Geneina in West Darfur, were forced to leave their land due to the ongoing conflict. While some settled in nearby localities in West Darfur, the majority escaped to Kalma camp, near Nyala, South Darfur. Two months ago, more than 120 of them found their way back home to the village.

They were part of the first returnees in an operation initiated by the Government of the Sudan with the assistance of United Nations agencies.

Immediately upon their arrival in the village, the returnees began rebuilding their homes. Families and friends were reunited, people began looking for work in nearby towns and children enrolled in school. People from neighboring villages

assisted them in constructing their houses and nearby community leaders also visited them to discuss ways of peaceful co-existence.

"We are very happy to return home, where our fathers grew up. We would like to feel that we are part of the community and we're asking for more assistance from humanitarian organizations to build our homes and our capacity for economic development," said one of the community leaders, Sheikh Abdallah Mohamed Ali.

Farming is the main source of income in this community. Since its inhabitants returned, they have not been able to undertake any farming activities due to lack of resources to cultivate their land and produce goods to take to the market. "We need donkeys and carts for transportation, and we need tools," added the Sheikh.

The women

Hawa Ali and Rugaha Ishag, both mothers raising three children, were among the women who moved back home in search of a better life. "When we arrived here, we worked in the valley during the harvest season," they explained. "We have been in touch with friends who we left behind in Nyala. They also want to return home one day, but they fear they won't have anything when they come back."

During their stay in Kalma camp, many of the displaced persons, particularly women and youth, received vocational training to enhance their employment opportunities and to strengthen enterprises that increased their income. While depending on food rations from humanitarian aid agencies, women also went to town to wash clothes or make bricks to earn



left. A returnee from Nyala builds her home in Sullu

top. Children at school in Sullu

PHOTOS: ALBERT GONZALEZ FARRAN

a salary. Hajja Adam, the head of the Women's Committee said, "We also learnt how to make fuel efficient stoves, produce groundnut paste, sew bags, bedding and table cloths, and with these skills, we were able to sell goods in the market to obtain extra income."

Life as it is now

Last January, a humanitarian team comprising UNAMID and a number of UN agencies, in coordination with the West Darfur Government Humanitarian Aid Commission, conducted a post-assessment visit to Sullu and other villages where IDPs from Kalma camp have returned. The team looked at the returnees' living conditions to determine how best to support them.

Sheikh Abdul Warith noted that the security situation in the area was calm,

but they needed additional basic services, including more education and health facilities, income-generating activities and vocational training.

The village has one basic school with five classrooms and a health care facility, which were both constructed and rehabilitated by UNAMID's quick impact projects initiative. The clinic is run by the Sudan Health Association (SUHA), a community-based organization which receives medicines from the Islamic Relief Organization and the school has three volunteer teachers. It recently received some materials and textbooks from the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF).

Despite the challenges the community is facing, everyone -- men, women and youth -- remains optimistic and eager to continue living in Sullu village, to

rehabilitate their land and ensure that their children are enrolled in schools. They are keen on using skills learned in Kalma camp to become self-sufficient instead of relying on humanitarian aid.

In the last few months, more and more displaced persons have returned to their homes in West Darfur registering the highest number of returnees in Darfur so far. UNAMID and humanitarian agencies on the ground continue to work together to ensure their safe arrival and to provide adequate supplies, including developmental facilities, so that they can enjoy the benefits of a stable life back in their village.



Refugees from Chad return home to Darfur

BY MUNTASIR SHARAFADIN

In 2003, at the start of the conflict, a reported one hundred thousand people left their homes in West Darfur to settle in neighbouring Chad. They had taken refuge in camps in eastern Chad to ensure protection. Due to improvement in security conditions and the humanitarian situation in West Darfur, since July 2010, many of these refugees began returning home.

Below is an excerpt of an interview with the Executive Director for Humanitarian Aid Commission (HAC) in West Darfur, Mr. Ismail Adam Mohammed.

VoD: What is the estimated number of Sudanese refugees who are living in camps in Chad?

HAC: Sudanese refugees in Chad number about 20,000 families amounting to approximately 100,000 persons.

VoD: How is the humanitarian work progressing in the internally displaced persons (IDP) camps in West Darfur State?

HAC: The humanitarian services in the



left. Children in Goz Mino village in West Darfur - one of the areas of returnee from Chad

PHOTOS: ALBERT GONZALEZ FARRAN

camps have improved with the provision of basic services such as health care, education, water and food.

VoD: What is HAC doing to encourage refugees to return to their villages?

HAC: HAC is assisting the returnees with provision of food items such as oil, grain, materials to build shelter and water supply. They have also provided tents to construct police stations, health care facilities and schools.

VoD: How many have returned as part of the voluntary repatriation programme to the state?

About 2,399 families, around 26,386 individuals, representing 65 villages have returned so far from refugee camps in eastern Chad.

VoD: When did the voluntary repatriation programme start?

HAC: It is an ongoing process which started in July 2010 following the signing of the Agreement between the Government of the Sudan and the Reform

and Liberals Movement as well as the Sudanese-Chadian relations, formation of the joint forces which are in charge of monitoring the border between the two countries.

VoD: Where are they located in West Darfur?

HAC: They have returned to 35 villages in the of Jebel Moon, 12 villages in Beda, 10 villages in Kulbus and 7 villages in Umdokhon and Habila .

VoD: Which entities are providing humanitarian assistance to returnees and what kind of assistance are they offering?

HAC: The Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs and the Humanitarian Aid Commission (HAC) have been providing assistance to the returnees in their villages. United Nations agencies, national and international organizations and the Arab Islamic organizations such as the Saudi and Qatari Red Crescent Societies have been supplying basic services including health care facilities, education centres, and the provision of livelihoods services

in collaboration with the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). Zakat Bureau gave seeds, farming equipment and distributed 1000 bags of millet to returnees in five villages Tendosa, Arum, Slough, Gildo and Andi.

VoD: How is UNAMID assisting the returnees?

HAC: UNAMID has set up many of the facilities in the villages including the construction of classrooms, an office space and a store in Guendry area in cooperation with Al-Isra Organization. The Mission has also implemented a number of quick impact projects for health care, education, water and construction of roads. It has also contributed to reconciliation efforts among different components in Darfur. UNAMID continues to provide security for humanitarian organizations to deliver services to those affected in the rural areas and for protection of civilians in the camps.

I call upon all parties to the conflict in Darfur including the Government to negotiate and bring about peace and stability to the people of Darfur.

The aftermath of fighting

BY GUIOMAR PAU SOLE



A UNAMID peacekeeper guards IDPs in Khor Abeche

PHOTO: ALBERT GONZALEZ FARRAN

The tenth of December 2010 will always mark the beginning of what would be a tragic milestone for the community of Khor Abeche, South Darfur, as fighting in the town and nearby villages forced the inhabitants to flee their homes seeking protection near the UNAMID team site in the area.

With the few belongings they were able to carry, the villagers settled in makeshift tents and huts while they received water and other amenities as well as basic health care from UNAMID peacekeepers. It was an emergency solution but, weeks later, it seems that the newly internally displaced persons (IDPs) have resigned themselves to their new lifestyle and to the situation.

Aziza Yousif, from Aradai village, explains that their houses were burnt in December. "We came here because we are afraid of more attacks." The IDPs are extremely reluctant to return to their homes, even though they are not far away.

Ahmed Mohamed Jared Nabi, from Jamalia, recounts a similar experience. "We lost everything, a lot of animals died after the bombings. We are not safe in our villages any longer," he says with resignation.

Under the protection of the peacekeepers the IDPs feel secure. UNAMID provides them with water every day and has set up a tent for medical assistance. The team site's clinic, originally for the use of the peacekeepers, is the only health care facility in the vicinity and is now sharing its resources with its new neighbours.

The recently displaced persons survive with very little. Humanitarian aid reaches the village from time to time.

Habiba Dulebait Abedbanat, from Um-Elkura village, says they brought some food, but still don't have enough.

Despite the scarcity of products, a

small market has been set up in the temporary camp. There are a few stands with vegetables and raw meat, as well as vendors who grill and sell meat, and a flour making machine has also been installed.

Although there are signs of daily life around the camp, people going back and forth and animals moving about, it is not a normal one. Children cannot go to school and adults are not able to collect firewood or cultivate their lands.

The local leaders said in a meeting with UNAMID's leadership that there were "many injured and some elder people who are now deaf. We lost all our property. The population of Khor Abeche has suffered too much."

Even if they start rebuilding a new life, the image of burnt homes, looted shops and maimed people will remain scorched in their memories for a very long time.

Shangil Tobaya - a town of social harmony

Interview with Shartai Adam Abker Rashid

BY AWATIF AKBAR

There is an old adage in Darfur that goes “Shangil Tobaya throws gold to you”. Like many old Arabic sayings, this one sounds like part of a song. Some explain the reason for this proverb is that the land of this town, located 70 kilometers south of El Fasher, North Darfur, is very fertile and produces a wealth of crops. While others say it’s because the area consists of many sources of income – agricultural, pastoral, and commercial.

Adam Abker Rashid is the shartai (senior community leader) of Shangil Tobaya. He inherited the position after his father became too old and the community decided that he was a suitable leader. Currently twelve Umdas from surrounding areas work under his administration.

Following a recent outburst of fighting in Shangil Tobaya, Voices of Darfur had a brief conversation with the shartai that we would like to share with you.

AA: What is the main activity of the inhabitants of Shangil Tobaya?

Shartai: The region relies on agriculture, especially tobacco as it is more profitable. However, an increasing number of inhabitants have started cultivating other crops, such as watermelons and vegetables. More wells are also being dug to facilitate the increased production.

AA: How are relations among the population?

Shartai: The original inhabitants of Shangil Tobaya came from varied groups. Almost 30 live peacefully and in social harmony here. One cannot recognize who is Fur or Zagawi or from another group. Because of cooperation and awareness among the youth and the community administration of the city, discrimination among groups did not exist in Shangil Tobaya at the beginning of the conflict in Darfur.

AA: There has been some fighting lately in Shangil Tobaya that has been of concern. What exactly happened there?

Shangil Tobaya is generally a calm region;

the people coexist peacefully with the inhabitants of the surrounding villages, with the host Government and with the different movements.

I cannot say whether or not the attack was organized against certain groups as I wasn’t in the place when the attack happened, but during armed conflict anything can be expected.

AA: What would you like to tell the people of Shangil Tobaya?

Shartai: I want to tell them to be rational. Darfur has witnessed a lot of misfortunes. I call on the people of Shangil Tobaya to be patient and to maintain their ties despite the suffering, and Shangil Tobaya will continue to be a town of social harmony.

AWATIF AKBAR IS A JOURNALIST BASED IN EL FASHER ■

Villagers on their way to a market in Shangil Tobaya

PHOTO: ALBERT GONZALEZ FARRAN





Offering a better future for street children

BY SHARON LUKUNKA

“Children need security and assistance in order to become a valuable part of the community,” said a child representative, Mohamed Oumar Ibrahim, during the opening ceremony of the Rehabilitation and Reintegration Centre for the Homeless Children in El Fasher, North Darfur

He was addressing what remains a serious concern as one of the most disturbing fallouts of the conflict – a growing number of ragged children running around the streets of El Fasher, consistently begging and scraping for food where and how they could.

This first facility dedicated to helping these children was inaugurated last December and funded by the North Darfur Ministry of Social Affairs and the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF). It takes care of more than 50 boys and girls every day, giving them a chance to be a part of a foster and alternative family.



left. Street children enjoying the refuge of the centre

top. School at the centre

PHOTOS: OLIVIER CHASSOT

“The centre is very important as, in addition to providing security and protection for the children, it will offer vocational training in accordance with State policies,” UNICEF Child Protection Specialist, Bernard Kitambala said. He emphasized that State and civil society organizations and the international community must lend their support to ensure a better future for the youth of Darfur.

Faiza Ismael Mohamed, 13 years old, is among the many street boys living in El Fasher. After his parents died a few years ago, he stopped going to school and now spends his time at the market in search of jobs to sustain himself. Since the centre opened, he goes there regularly where he is able to indulge in his love for music. “I enjoy playing the piano with my friends and I want to learn more,” he explained.

Haja Abubakar Yusef and her friend Anfal Hassan Musa, who were present

at the opening event, expressed their excitement. “We look forward to participating in the training programmes.”

The centre employs six social workers who keep the children busy with music lessons, table tennis, video games and study sessions. These employees listen to, counsel and follow up on the children’s cases.

A local charity organization, led by Halima Tibin Bosh, has joined the venture by cooking a daily meal and the UNAMID Police has provided school materials.

Director General for Social Affairs in El Fasher, Umda Mohamed Abaker said his Ministry considered it a priority to offer services for the homeless and orphaned children, and to provide foster homes for those in need. This centre will assist in filling this gap by raising the street children’s self-worth and, very importantly,

inhibiting their use of harmful substances.

The Ministry of Social Affairs has plans to build a social service facility for street and homeless children on the outskirts of El Fasher and, to that end, is in the process of raising funds for the project.

The opening of this initial centre is a first step in supporting the disempowered and disadvantaged children of North Darfur. They now have a place where they can go to learn, receive the care and attention that young children need and to socialize with others. As Kitambala says, its launch is “a milestone development as the facility will act as a day care centre for young children in need”.



Health workers are briefed before embarking on the vaccination campaign



A child receives the polio vaccine in Abu Shouk camp



Iklas Ibrahim Musa

Action against polio in Darfur

BY SHARON LUKUNKA

Ikhlas Ibrahim Musa is a disabled young woman living in El Fasher, the capital of North Darfur. She is among the 3,000 people there who suffer from polio. She uses crutches, but that does not prevent her from living a normal life.

Ikhlas is currently working as an administrative programme health supervisor for a non-governmental organization, Partner Aid International, and she supervises the mobile clinic at Zam Zam IDP camp. She is also actively involved in the community. In 2000, she joined the El Fasher society for persons with disabilities and is a women's leader. In 2005 and 2006, she was the Sudan's representative at the Arab League gathering for integration of disabled women in society in Cairo, Egypt.

One of her main functions is to raise awareness among mothers about the benefits of the polio vaccine. "People need to be more informed about the importance of vaccinations in order to eradicate polio in the region," she said.

Because of her disability, Ms. Musa has received an education grant from the Sudanese Government which she used to upgrade her skills and knowledge in the area of health. She is also given assistance to pay for medical treatment in Khartoum. According to Dr. Muneer Mohammed Matar of the Health Ministry's Emergency Humanitarian Action division, the Government has established a programme to provide assistance to Sudanese with disabilities.

Immunization campaign

From 28 February, during a three-day campaign organized by the Sudanese Ministry of Health, in collaboration with the World Health



Volunteers in Abu Shouk camp place marks on the wall after administering polio vaccines to children



Registering each child's name after vaccination

Organization (WHO) and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), thousands of teams were spread across Darfur states to administer the polio vaccine to all children under 5 years of age. It has now been extended to inaccessible regions, such as Jebel Marra in West Darfur, where polio is considered a high risk due to ongoing insecurity in these areas. To date, more than 400, 000 children living in Darfur have been given vaccines. In El Fasher, the team conducted door-to-door visits, in the towns, villages and IDP camps vaccinating the children living in each household. On the day before the campaign began, officials from the Health Ministry informed parents and guardians that all children younger than 5 years old must be vaccinated.

Dr. Matar said the last reported case of polio in Darfur was in 2004. The Government of the Sudan conducts a four vaccination campaigns annually as part of its efforts to prevent and eradicate the disease. The next campaign is scheduled for June this year. Dr. Matar noted that Alteena and Umbroo regions in North Darfur are considered to be high risk areas and the aim of the Government's

immunization campaign is to ensure a polio free environment.

The campaign is designed to get rid of the polio virus which re-emerged in the Darfur region in 2008 when several outbreaks were reported.

For its part, UNICEF's mandate is to reach all children and immunize them as, so far, that is the only preventable measure against polio. The disease can kill and is responsible for causing disabilities in children. UNICEF Programme Manager, Dr. Zeroual Azzedine told Voices of Darfur

that, in recognition of the specific needs of children with disabilities, the agency was developing a new plan to assist and reintegrate them into the society.

Health officials also stress that giving the polio vaccine multiple times to a child can save his or her life.



Administering the vaccine

PHOTOS BY OLIVIER CHASSOT



National staff proudly contribute to UNAMID

BY ALA MAYYAH

Carrying his updated résumé, Siddig Mohammed arrived at UNAMID's headquarters a year and a half ago. A security guard at the gate took his job application and informed him that someone would call him for an interview if he passed muster. He went back to his home in Abu Shouk camp for internally displaced persons (IDPs), on the outskirts of El Fasher, North Darfur, hoping that the call would come soon.

Siddig was confident about his professional experience. And he wanted a job -- one where he could fulfill his goals, professionally and personally. He was eager to participate in supporting the efforts for his people who lost their homes so they could have security and return to their villages safely one day. UNAMID seemed to be the right place for him to do

that.

Three weeks later, he was informed that he was given a job as a public information assistant in the Mission. Since then, he has been realizing his dream of serving his community through various outreach activities.

It is part of UNAMID's policy to engage as many Darfuris as possible in its activities where they can play positive roles in their community. At the beginning of this year, the number of national staff members in UNAMID was close to 2,800, almost double the number of internationals, forming the backbone of the Mission's civilian component. Some of them are team leaders in their areas of competence. Others are assigned to be in charge during the absence of the principal head of unit,

and several serve in the Security Section, side by side with international security officers, to ensure the safety of all UNAMID staff.

Fatima Mohammed, from El Fasher, a single mother of three daughters, started her job with UNAMID from the day the Mission opened its doors in her town. As a security guard, she currently assists in monitoring the movements of cars, personnel and visitors through the gates of the office area. "I'm glad to provide security for the staff members," she said. "I know most of them by now, internationals and nationals. They greet me with a smile when they pass the gate."

Other Sudanese are employed for their language skills. For instance, Imadeldin Hassan lived and worked in the United



far left. UNAMID CPID staff Siddiq Mohammed

PHOTO: ALBERT GONZALEZ FARRAN

left. Fatima Mohammed in fore front at the entrance of the UNAMID headquarters in El Fasher

PHOTO: SGT. SAINEY COLEY

Mission. It is a fact that we, international staff, cannot do our work without them. We need each other and to rely on each other to support the Mission," he noted.

UNAMID publicizes vacancies in various media, on its website, in local newspapers and on bulletin boards at the gates of all of the Mission's headquarters offices. Applications submitted are always considered impartially, regardless of ethnic origin or religion, and selection is based on candidates' qualifications and experience.

With a smile of satisfaction, Siddiq says, "When I applied for the job I didn't know anyone here, but now I have many friends. We share the same goals and challenges. I cooperate with all colleagues and learn something new while helping them. To me, being in this job has been positive and fruitful."



Imadeldin Hassan Ali Said Ahmed (second from right) translates for a meeting with US Senator John Kerry (left), Director of Public Information Kemal Saiki (second from left) and a local community leader

PHOTO: ALBERT GONZALEZ FARRAN

States for more than twelve years. When he received an offer of appointment from UNAMID for a position as senior translator, he gladly moved to El Fasher to participate in this peacekeeping operation in his country.

Were we to highlight the positive contributions of UNAMID's national employees, then the list would be almost inexhaustible. Their varying roles in some of the most important elements of the Mission's work was well reflected in the statement of the Mission's Joint Special Representative, Ibrahim Gambari, during a meeting he held with UNAMID staff earlier this year.

"I would like to specifically acknowledge and commend the contribution of our national colleagues to the success of this





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