

UNAMID's publication for the people of Darfur

# VOICES

of Darfur

JANUARY 2011

## THE POWER OF KNOWLEDGE

Efforts to reduce illiteracy  
among IDP women

## ARTIST BRINGS HIS MESSAGE HOME

An interview with Omar Ihsas

## A LIFE IN SCHOOL

A teacher who aims to  
educate his community



AFRICAN UNION – UNITED NATIONS  
MISSION IN DARFUR  
(UNAMID)

# IN THIS ISSUE

January 2010 | Vol II • No.1

## TIMELINE

---

03 | December at a Glance

## COMMUNITY

---

04 | A life in school

06 | Private business on rise

## CULTURE

---

08 | Artist brings his message home

## WOMEN

---

10 | The power of knowledge

12 | Tea for everyone

## UNAMID

---

13 | Darfur overland

14 | Women networking for peace

Front Cover Photo by Albert Gonzalez Farran



Back Cover Photo by Olivier Chassot



# VOICES

of Darfur

### DIRECTOR/CPID

Kemal Saiki

### EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Chris Cycmanick

### CONTRIBUTORS

Ala Mayyahi  
Sharon Lukunka  
Guiomar Pau Sole  
Mayada Umbadda  
Lt. Col. Achamyesh Debela  
Philomene Mukankusi

### PHOTOGRAPHERS

Olivier Chassot  
Albert Gonzalez Farran  
Sgt. Sainey Colley

### GRAPHIC DESIGNER

Arie Cahyadi Santoso

### PUBLISHED BY :

UNAMID Communications  
and Public Information Division  
Phone: +249 92 244 7941 to 7944  
Email: [unamid-publicinformation@un.org](mailto:unamid-publicinformation@un.org)  
Website: <http://unamid.unmissions.org>

 [facebook.com/UNAMID](https://www.facebook.com/UNAMID)

 [twitter.com/UN\\_AUinDarfur](https://twitter.com/UN_AUinDarfur)

The designations employed and the presentation of the material in this publication do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of UNAMID concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area, or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries.

Material contained in this publication may be freely quoted or reprinted, provided credit is attributed to UNAMID.

# DECEMBER AT A GLANCE



**DECEMBER 01** Two persons are killed and several wounded in Zalingei, West Darfur, when gunfire breaks out during a demonstration. The incident takes place during the final leg of a four day visit to Darfur by the Doha peace negotiation team, headed by Qatari Foreign Minister Ahmed bin Abdulla Al-Mahmoud and AU-UN Joint Chief Mediator Djibrill Bassolé.



**DECEMBER 01** UNAMID celebrates World AIDS Day with a wide array of activities including a play, recitation of poems and a candle lighting. Under the theme "Universal Access and Human Rights," the occasion highlights that access for all to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support is a critical part of human rights.

**DECEMBER 06** UNAMID Darfur-Darfur Dialogue and Consultation (DDDC) in collaboration with Nyala University's Peace Studies Center begin a two-day training on conflict resolution and peace building. The event brings together nearly 40 female participants providing them with basic negotiation skills aimed at fast-tracking the Darfur peace process.



**DECEMBER 07** A delegation of Ambassadors and representatives from member states of the current UN Security Council (UNSC) accredited to the Sudan visits Darfur. The group travels to El Fasher and Shangil Tobaya to gain first-hand knowledge of the Mission's activities and visits nearby internally displaced persons (IDP) camps of Shaddad and New Shangil Tobaya. A second group of diplomats, also from UNSC countries, visits two days later.

**DECEMBER 10** UNAMID carries out a series of cultural activities in North, South and West Darfur under the theme "Human Rights Defenders Acting to End Discrimination," following the commemoration of Human Rights Day.



**DECEMBER 10** Fighting erupts in the village of Khor Abeche, 80km northeast of Nyala, South Darfur. The incident at the locality, known to have supporters of the armed movement, Sudan Liberation Army / Minni Minawi (SLA/MM), is followed by similar aggressions on 11 and 17 December. The three assaults result in at least two dead, several injured and the destruction of homes. More than 9,000 civilians flee to UNAMID's nearby team site for protection and temporary humanitarian assistance.



**DECEMBER 11** United States Special Envoy to the Sudan Scott Gration concludes a three-day visit to Darfur to discuss the security and humanitarian situation with UNAMID and other international partners. Gration travels with UNAMID officials from El Fasher to Nyala by road and visits several IDP camps.

**DECEMBER 14** A shooting incident between Sudanese Forces and SLA/MM elements is reported in Shangil Tobaya, North Darfur. A UNAMID national staff member is injured by a stray bullet.



**DECEMBER 17** UNAMID receives at its headquarters in El Fasher ambassadors and representatives from the African Union Peace and Security Council for a one-day field visit. The envoys also travel to Kabkabiya, located approximately 140km west of El Fasher, where they witness the Mission's activities and meet with local authorities.

**DECEMBER 20** An unknown group of armed men attacks an IDP camp in Shaeria, 45 km southeast of Khor Abeche in South Darfur, burning down part of the settlement. Several of the camp's residents flee to a nearby UNAMID team site.

**DECEMBER 24** Clashes between Sudanese Forces and rebel movements are reported in Dar al-Salaam, 60 km south of El Fasher, North Darfur.



## A life in school

### A teacher who aims to educate his community

BY SHARON LUKUNKA

Abdulhamid Abass Abdulhamid has been a teacher for more than half a century. Accordingly, this long experience has given him a unique perspective on Darfur's educational system. He is not a common instructor; his family is part of the region's history.

Many in his community are familiar with his family's story. His great grandfather, Ibrahim Garad, was the last Sultan killed in the battle of Manawashi in 1874. Following this, all of the Sultan's family members moved to Egypt. One of the Sultan's older sons, Abdulhamid, returned around 1929 and was appointed as Emir of Zalingei, West Darfur. One of the towns in the region is named after him, Hamadiya.

Named after his grandfather, Abdulhamid Abass also has a prominent role in his community. For many years he has molded people's most valuable resource, their children. "When my two daughters



far left and below. Abdulhamid Abass Abdulhamid teaches English at Ahigro private school in El Fasher.

left. His grandfather Abdulhamid was Emir of Zalingei.

PHOTOS: ALBERT GONZALEZ FARRAN

was hired by the Zalingei Intermediate School, now Zalingei University. During his professional life, he has taught English, Geography and History. He is now an English instructor at the Al-Hijra private school in El Fasher town.

Abdulhamid says the education system has seen a lot of variations since he began teaching. The greatest change was in 1989 when the syllabus was reduced from 12 to 11 years. Classrooms are also more crowded now and the number of pupils continues to increase. Some classes have up to 80 students, whereas before the maximum limit was about 50.

He considers himself fortunate for having taught in several public schools in El Fasher, al-Jeer, Kutum and Kornoï, and two private schools in El Fasher town. Now with nearly 50 years of experience behind him, Abdulhamid Abass Abdulhamid refuses to retire, choosing to work part-time, which includes tutoring English from his home.

After spending many years educating, Abdulhamid's advice to other teachers is simple: They should only use English when teaching the language, and try to instill good habits such as courtesy and patience in their pupils.

In his spare time, Abdulhamid enjoys reading English novels, though he says that he is now focusing more on history books. He is currently reading "Darfur's sorrow," by M.W Daly, who presented him with a copy the book during one of his visits to the region last year.

Abdulhamid encourages every student to stay in school, respect their teachers and peers, as education will teach them discipline and responsibility, and contribute to their future.

were young, I used to help them with their English schoolwork. They have always excelled at school," he explains.

He attended elementary and secondary schools in Zalingei and El Fasher, and later travelled to Port Sudan where he completed his secondary school education in the 1950s. After his studies, he attended Bakht al-Ruda Teacher Training Institute, located in the White Nile region, one of the first institutions of higher learning in the Sudan. The college later opened several branches in different parts of the country including El Fasher.

In that time, the education system allowed teachers to be transferred to anywhere in the state. "It helped in the dissemination of culture," he remembers. Today, it is no longer the case. Teachers are employed from universities in the area.

His career took off around 1964, when he





*Samir Romani in his supermarket.*

## Private business on rise

Market represents economic opportunities for many

BY ALA MAYYAH

All year round, El Fasher's downtown market is bustling with activity.

The overflow of shoppers is a daily occurrence at Mr. Samir Romani's supermarket, one of the largest in the city. Samir and his assistants constantly go back and forth between the cash register and the crowded shelves to accommodate the requests made by the flow of customers. "Business in town is much better now," he says.

The situation in his and in many other stores shows a progressing economy. But, that is not the whole story here.

There are contradicting views among the inhabitants on whether or not opportunities are available for all; for new business owners and for those long established.

Between 1992 and 2008, business boomed in Khartoum, due to a liberal economic policy, an increase in oil production, and investment by foreign companies. The open market policy was to provide opportunities for the private sector to expand and contribute to economic development throughout the country, including Darfur. But when the conflict intensified in the region,

beginning in 2003, security issues became the major concern for most inhabitants and investment seemed perilous. Thus, the unsaturated markets in their areas remained limited to large merchants.

In 2008, as economic conditions in most parts of the world started slowing down, Darfur's began to boom. And, as the number of international organizations, NGOs, and agencies increased, and demands arose accordingly for many commodities, more people became encouraged to open new shops in the city. But, what does it take now for someone to create his or her first enterprise?

Opinions differ as some see that opportunities are still limited to those who have the capital and good connections. Samir Romani, for example, is one of three brothers sharing a number of shops. Their company was started by their father, a well-known local merchant, in 1956. "Time has changed. It is difficult nowadays for anyone to begin without lots of money," he says.

As much as this could be true for most people around the world, other shop owners in town provided a more optimistic view.

Mahmoud al-Sayih, a young man who trades in French and local perfumes, mentioned that he opened his humble shop in El Fasher in the beginning of 2010. He intends to expand next year and hire assistants. "My establishment is doing well, sometimes my sales reach up to 700 pounds per day (about 270 USD). If I

feared failure and stood aside I wouldn't have had my success now," he says with a smile.

Another example is Munir Hamid, an ambitious young man who opened an office affiliated with the international shipping company, DHL, in 2008. He started with a modest amount of cash, enough only for the rent and for basic office equipment. He explained that he gets 25 per cent of the total monthly profit and that is worthy enough for him to keep the office running.

"I advise all youth who are unemployed to consider starting a private business, even a small one, rather than waiting to get a job," he expresses. "Yes, the major commodities are dominated by the big merchants, but there are many items that are in high demand and can sell well in town. The situation here has developed remarkably with the arrival of the African

Union, and later, UNAMID," he adds in a confident tone.

Mr. Hamid is also preparing to work toward a PhD certificate in chemistry and planning to invest in a chemical industrial project in El Fasher in the near future, as the government is offering land for business purposes at reduced prices.

A neutral look at the current situation in the locality, one can see that it is sitting on an abundance of opportunities, still untouched, and available for all inhabitants whether they are new or already established in the markets.

---

*Mahmoud Al-Sayih in his perfume shop.*

PHOTOS: ALBERT GONZALEZ FARRAN





*Omar Ihsas at one of his concert.*

PHOTO COURTESY OF: OMAR IHSAS

## Artist brings his message home

### An interview with Omar Ihsas

BY ALA MAYYAH

While renowned musician Omar Ihsas has enjoyed international success, bringing Sudanese music to thousands of admirers in the United Kingdom, the United States and Canada, it is his love for Darfur that matters most to him.

Beginning his career in his late teens, Omar Ihsas would leave his hometown of Nyala, South Darfur, at the age of 23 for Khartoum. It was there that his talent would be realized after auditioning for the Institute of Music and Drama in 1981.

#### **Tell us about your musical career. Did you obtain success immediately?**

Success did not come easy at all, especially given the goals I set for myself. I have had four difficult starting points. The first was in Darfur, the second in Khartoum, the third when I began using Darfuri rhythms,

which were resisted by some media institutions, and the final when I started performing abroad. Still, there remain obstacles, but they are minor since I am always supported by my audience, with whom I share my love and appreciation.

#### **Is Sudanese music influenced by African or Arabic rhythms, and where does Darfuri music stand in this matter?**

Both rhythms exist in the Sudanese identity. We are all affected by the Arabic tones in some parts of Sudan, but all our rhythms are African. In Darfur, the Sudanese identity is felt strongly. In the Baggara area, there are tribes that still use some of the old Arabic music (Maqamat) associated with typical African beats. So the African beat is a common element in our music as Sudan is an African Arabic country with African music character. I

personally show this in my music.

#### **What projects are you currently working on?**

I am arranging a large singing project. It's an operetta about Sultan Ali Dinar, accompanied by a number of Sudanese singers, and written by the poet Mahjoub Julgam, who is from El Fasher. There is also preparation for a peace song to children of Darfur in cooperation with UNAMID, in which I will do the music composition and art direction. In addition, I'm doing the final touches for a music video, called Azoom, written by Darfuri poet Alim Abbas Mohammed Noor, he is from El Fasher too. The Word Azoom is the name of the biggest valley in Darfur, and the poem won the grand prize in a 1973 poetry contest.





*Omar Ihsas performs at a UNAMID –organized concert in El Fasher in August 2010.*

PHOTO: OLIVIER CHASSOT

**Do you think Sudanese expatriates prefer foreign music, or do they still like Sudanese songs?**

Sudanese abroad are still close to their traditions and arts, especially the songs of their country. But they are definitely affected by foreign music, especially the youth. It is the elders who are closer to the Sudanese songs as they are emotionally attached to these songs while living far from home.

**In your opinion, what kind of support do young Darfuri artists need?**

They require support from society, family and the state. When the school does not recognize talent at an early age, the family should take on this important role. Now, with so many TV channels and varied programming, it has become

easier for Darfuri families to accept the idea of having an artist among its members. My generation didn't find that when we began our career in this art. The government also should have an effective role in supporting the artists' progress. We had to study in Khartoum due to the lack of schools for music in the country, except in the capital and Juba in South Sudan.

**You performed in many concerts in Darfur, to deliver messages of peace. Did many young people attend and how effective do you think these messages were?**

First, I would like to commend UNAMID for arranging many of these concerts. They help the youth focus on positive activities. A large number of them attended; they liked it so much they kept contacting me asking when the next performance would

be, so I believe the messages were very effective.

**What would you like to tell the youth of Darfur?**

My message is: you represent half of the present and all the future. You have the responsibility for Darfur's coming years. It is in your hands to make bright or dull. So let's prove to our elders that we can co-exist despite our differences and move beyond the past. We must show everyone that we are the most capable of creating a peace.



## The power of knowledge

### Efforts to reduce illiteracy among IDP women

BY GUIOMAR PAU SOLE

Could you imagine holding this magazine and seeing a jumbled set of letters, not able to understand a thing? And try to imagine not being able to write a note or sign a document?

Learnt at an early age, reading and writing is just an everyday activity for most of the population. But not everyone has the same privilege. In Darfur, as in other developing regions, many women, especially the elderly in rural areas, suffer from illiteracy. Hopefully, the tide is now changing as everyday, more women discover how literacy can transform their lives.

"I didn't have the opportunity to go to school when I was young because I had to work at home and at the family farm," says Khadija Abubakar Adam. The 35-year-old woman, originally from the village of Tawilla, North Darfur, now lives in the

Abu Shouk camp for internally displaced persons (IDPs). The camp is near El Fasher and 45km far from her hometown. It is here where she has found the opportunity to make up for lost time, learning what she missed in her youth.

A year and a half ago, Khadija started taking literacy lessons in the Abu Shouk Women's Center. "I am very happy now, because if I find a written paper, I can understand it," she explains. Hadija adds that she is also able to help her young children with their homework. Moreover, with her new knowledge she can read the Koran and some prayer books.

The center was funded by the International Rescue Committee (IRC), one of thirteen International NGOs expelled from Darfur in March 2009. Now the facility is run by the Women's Development Association

Network, formed by more than 50 women's associations of North Darfur, with the collaboration of the UN Population Fund, UNDP and UNAMID, which funded the rehabilitation and several activities.

Inside the center's thatched classrooms, about 80 students learn Arabic, mathematics, Islamic studies and general culture from Sunday to Thursday, between noon and 4:00 pm. But not all is about studying in this special school: Tuesdays are dedicated to drinking tea and applying henna. "Not only the lessons are important. Women here forget about the problems they have outside," explains the deputy director of the Women Network, Suad Abdela Mohamed.

The students' ages vary from their twenties to their sixties and some attend courses with their infants. "There is no age limit.



far left. Students learn mathematics in Abu Shouk Women Center.

resources to organize extra projects, but the center remains committed to its aim of offering women the possibility of studying.

Another successful student is Zina Ali Mukhtar. She is 25 and had never attended school in her hometown of Tawilla. Zina is the oldest of her siblings and had to work at home when she was young. But now in Abu Shouk, where she has lived for seven years, she has the chance to take lessons. "My mind is more open than before, learning to read has changed my life," she expresses joyfully.

Zina doesn't see it as a way to have more job opportunities; she simply wants to learn more. Further, she is committed to doing her best to ensure that her son and daughter go to school.

The cases of Hadija and Zina are not isolated. In the past few decades, women in Darfur have faced serious inequalities in gaining access to education. Safia, the director of the center, admits that there are a lot of illiterate women in Abu Shouk, but they cannot enroll a larger number due to a shortage in funds.

According to 2003 UNESCO statistics, adult literacy among Sudan's population (excluding the southern region) is estimated to be 61 per cent. This figure is worst amongst women, as half of this segment's adults are illiterate.

Despite the old traditions that kept girls away of school, everyday more women in Darfur discover the power of literacy. It is indeed a fundamental right and it is a tool to enhance human capabilities and eradicate poverty.



top and bottom. Several women attend the classes with their babies.

PHOTOS: ALBERT GONZALEZ FARRAN

Anyone who has ambition can come and register," says the director of the center, Safia Bashir Sali.

Trainings for women in food-processing and cooking, are also offered with the help

of UN agencies. Suad and Safia remember that, with the IRC, there were once more activities, such as women's health and handcraft workshops.

Nowadays, they don't have enough



*Rugia Hussein Ahmed serves tea to her clients.*

PHOTO: ALBERT GONZALEZ FARRAN

## Tea for everyone

### A business that refreshes the soul

BY SHARON LUKUNKA

"Come and take a seat, let the tea cool you down," the tea lady calls out to a passersby. Rugia Hussein Ahmed is just one of many women who works full-time helping to support her family.

Married and with two children, she started her business more than two years ago, selling different kinds of beverages including coffee and red and green tea, flavored with spices such as mint and cinnamon. Among her frequent customers are international workers, drivers, local security officers and students. She hopes to one day expand her business to serve food to her clients.

Today, quite a number of women in the

town of El Fasher, North Darfur, own tea business. They are portable and easy to set up. Known in Arabic as *sit alshai*, these women's stands are found in every corner under the shade of trees and buildings and next to other traders, such as shoeshiners and phone cards salesmen.

The tea ladies start before the sun rises, lighting fires, shaking jars, and spooning sugar. The city runs on tea; it lightens the hours, restores the soul in the afternoon swelter, and enlivens the chatter of residents including the laborers, bankers and sheiks.

There is always a kettle ready over a small charcoal stove. A typical tea lady sits

on a plastic chair with a small brightly painted wooden box or cabinet with many miscellaneous glass jars of tea, sugar and spices on top of it. There is a jug or two of water next to her, a bucket for washing dishes and an empty bowl for the clean ones. Situated around her stand are usually five or so short wooden colorful stools for customers.

The tea ladies know the stories of their town well enough, and as you would expect after years of practice, they have become experts in making tea.

# Darfur overland

## Security and health concerns highlight road trip through region

BY LT. COL. ACHAMYELESH DEBELA



An Ethiopian tactical helicopter escorts UNAMID's long range patrol.

PHOTOS: SGT. SAINY COLLEY

The distance between El Fasher and Nyala, the capitals of North and South Darfur, is 195 kilometres. While this might not seem so far, the journey can be long, as the terrain is difficult and security concerns are a factor.

UNAMID usually covers this route by air, however United States Special Envoy to the Sudan Scott Gration, accompanied by UNAMID Force Commander Lt Gen Patrick Nyamvumba and other Mission officials, carried out this trip overground in December 2010. The objective was to assess the overall situation firsthand.

The patrol started in El Fasher at 0800 hours en route to the Mission's team site in Shangil Tobaya. Upon their arrival, the delegates were honored by the quarter guard of the Tanzanian battalion and were briefed on security matters. During the discussion, it was noted that humanitarian work has suffered in the area due to instability.

The convoy continued on its way, joined by the Nepalese Army Special operations

Task Force, Rwandan and Tanzanian troops on the ground and Ethiopian tactical helicopters.



UNAMID Force Commander Patrick Nyamvumba and US envoy Scott Gration visits the World Vision Center in Menawashi, South Darfur.

The next stopover was at the international NGO World Vision's primary health care center, established in February 2005 in Menawashi, South Darfur. The guests were impressed by the activities of the facility that delivers primary care to the whole community, including vaccination

services in collaboration with the Ministry of Health. Its staff also assists pregnant women and trains midwives. The latter are available 24 hours per day to assist mothers in childbirth at home when there is no access to the health facilities.

Aside from preventive care and treatment, the center also offers literacy classes to adults and adolescents, with special attention to women. Various gender issues including women's rights, training and support on income generating activities are also addressed. In addition, a Children Friendly Centre, set up by World Vision, for vulnerable children has been developed.

After eight hours on the road, the group reached Nyala and with it came a better understanding of the needs of the people and the work of the peacekeepers.

## Women networking for peace

An initiative aimed at establishing partnership between female police officers

BY PHILOMENE MUKANKUSI



*UNAMID Deputy Police Commissioner Hester Paneras in a preparatory meeting of the Police Women Network.*

PHOTO: ALBERT GONZALEZ FARRAN

With the aim of building bridges between female police officers working in Darfur, the Mission launched last December the UNAMID Police Women Network.

The forum will contribute to establishing broader relations among the Mission's women police officers and to create a partnership with Sudanese policewomen, sharing ideas and knowledge. The intention is to avoid duplication in tasks and to complement and support each other's work related to child protection, gender issues, human rights and community policing.

"The formation of this network will not only compliment the initiatives of UNAMID Police in discussing concerns relevant to the fulfilment of the Mission's mandate but will also afford all stakeholders in law enforcement agencies to share experiences on challenges while handling issues relating to gender mainstreaming and gender-based violence," said UNAMID Police Commissioner James Oppong-Boanuh, during the launching event.

The chairperson of the Police Women Network, Habiba Twumasi-Sarpong, a police advisor from Ghana, commented

that "such a partnership will contribute towards professional development, and the retention and progression of female staff, both in UNAMID and with the Government of Sudan Police."

Twumasi-Sarpong added that the group has come together to share ideas and experiences and will positively affect police women in Darfur in protecting and serving the people with integrity in accordance with recommended international standards.



# LET YOUR VOICE BE HEARD!

How would you like to see your work published right here?

Voices of Darfur welcomes real-life stories and articles written by Darfuris about their community.

Your submission can address such issues as:

Comprehensive peace, co-existence, renouncing violence, respect for law, women and children rights, education, social and economic development, and positive participation in community.

The piece may be written in formal Arabic or in English, either typed or written in legible handwriting. Please provide your name and telephone number.

While not all submissions can be published, we will however notify you if your story is selected.


Please email to:

[unamid-publicinformation@un.org](mailto:unamid-publicinformation@un.org), with the subject line "Voices of Darfur"

Or send via post to:

**UNAMID**

Agricultural Research Corporation  
CPID- Publications unit (Rm# D 2.1)  
P.O. Box 59  
El-Fasher, Darfur  
Sudan





**PUBLISHED BY :**

UNAMID Communications and Public Information Division

Phone: +249 92 244 7941 to 7944

Email: [unamid-publicinformation@un.org](mailto:unamid-publicinformation@un.org)

Website: <http://unamid.unmissions.org>



[facebook.com/UNAMID](https://www.facebook.com/UNAMID)



[twitter.com/UN\\_AUinDarfur](https://twitter.com/UN_AUinDarfur)