

A close-up portrait of Salwa Mukhtar Saleh, a woman with glasses and a pink headscarf adorned with gold and red floral ornaments. She is looking slightly to the side with a serious expression.

VOICES

of Darfur

DECEMBER 2014

Darfur's Designs

An Interview with
Salwa Mukhtar Saleh

**A Conversation with
UNAMID's Force Commander**

*Paul Mella on the Mission's
military component*

Displaced Children Hopeful

*Education generates optimism
among children in camps*

El Geneina Prospers

*Stability brings socioeconomic
development*



AFRICAN UNION - UNITED NATIONS
MISSION IN DARFUR
(UNAMID)

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A close-up of an intricate thobe design created by noted Darfuri designer, Dr. Salwa Mukhtar Saleh. Photo by Hamid Abdulsalam, UNAMID.

I'm pleased to introduce the December 2014 issue of *Voices of Darfur*, which, like other issues of *Voices*, contains news, features and interviews not only about unique aspects of life in Darfur but also about UNAMID's ongoing efforts to facilitate lasting peace in the region.

This issue includes two interviews, first an exclusive with UNAMID's Force Commander. In the interview, Lt. General Paul Mella provides insight into his strategic perspective on the challenges faced by the Mission's military component as well as an inside look at the successes military peacekeepers have achieved in protecting civilians. Ms. Ala Mayyahi conducted the second interview, our cover feature, with Salwa Mukhtar Saleh. In the interview, Dr. Saleh talks with *Voices* about her design sensibility, her views on the challenges faced by women and youth in Darfur as well as the role played by local intellectuals in the ongoing peace process.

In "Displaced Children in Camps Remain Hopeful," Ms. Sharon Lukunka describes how many years of conflict in Darfur have resulted in the proliferation of camps for internally displaced persons and an education system that lacks basic services. Ms. Lukunka explores how the Mission, through its civilian, military and police peacekeepers, works consistently with displaced populations in the region, to identify and address

issues concerning children, their education and violations committed against them.

In "El Geneina: A Stable Society in the Midst of Conflict," Mr. Emadeldin Rijal describes how a strategic geographical location and overarching unity among local communities has led to the development of a vibrant economy and enviable social cohesion in the capital of West Darfur. As Mr. Rijal illustrates, El Geneina's reputation as a strategic trading hub has been enhanced by infrastructural improvements such as hospitals, a new theatre and the new airport which connects it directly to the federal capital of Sudan, Khartoum, as well as other major Darfuri towns.

Finally, in "Markets in Darfur," Mr. Hamid Abdulsalam and Mr. Salah Mohammed present a photo essay designed to highlight the special position marketplaces hold in the Darfuri socioeconomic structure. Darfuri markets, such as the El Fasher market in North Darfur, are vibrant, thriving spaces that symbolize the spirit of entrepreneurship and resilience inherent in local communities across this conflict-affected region.

As *Voices of Darfur* continues to evolve as a news magazine, we welcome your feedback. To send comments by email, please put "Letters to the Editor / *Voices of Darfur*" in the subject line and send the email to unamid-publicinformation@un.org.

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ON THE COVER



Academic and womenswear designer, Dr. Salwa Mukhtar Saleh, has carved out a significant niche for herself among her clientele. Dr. Saleh creates tasteful, high quality Sudanese thobes as well as accessories such as handbags and shoes.



On 3 September 2013, a young child is pictured at the opening ceremony of a secondary school for girls sponsored by UNAMID in Shangil Tobaya, North Darfur. Photo by Hamid Abdulsalam, UNAMID.

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UNAMID Acting Head Participates in Darfur Negotiations between Government and Non-signatory Movements in Addis Ababa

On 23 November 2014, the African Union-United Nations Acting Joint Special Representative (AJSR) and Joint Chief Mediator a.i. for Darfur, Abiodun Bashua, participated in the opening session of the negotiations between the Government of Sudan and non-signatory Darfuri movements in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

The opening session was chaired by former South African President Thabo Mbeki, the Chairman of the African Union High-Level Implementation Panel (AUHIP), and attended by representatives from the African Union (AU), Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), Government of Sudan, Sudan Liberation Army/Minni Minawi and Justice and Equality Movement/Gibril.

Having thanked the Government of Ethiopia and the



On 23 November 2014, the AU-UN Acting Joint Special Representative and Joint Chief Mediator a.i. for Darfur, Abiodun Bashua, participates in the opening session of the negotiations between the Government of Sudan and non-signatory Darfuri movements in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Photo by Hamid Abdulsalam, UNAMID.

AU for sponsoring the negotiations, President Mbeki welcomed the start of discussions between the Government of Sudan and the movements to end the conflict in Darfur in collaboration with the UN, UNAMID and IGAD.

He also indicated that the national dialogue initiative announced by President Bashir earlier this year pro-

vides an opportunity for a comprehensive and inclusive process to address the challenges faced by Sudan, and how welcome this call has been to the AUHIP and the entire international community in facilitating a holistic approach to deal with the conflict in Darfur.

Cognizant of the challenges ahead, both the Government of Sudan and the

movements reiterated their principal positions and their commitment for a negotiated end to the Darfur conflict through dialogue and peaceful means.

President Mbeki wished the parties success in the negotiations and encouraged them to overcome challenges and differences to create an environment that is conducive for peace.

UNAMID Launches Campaign against Recruitment of Child Soldiers



On 26 November 2014, pupils of the Masteriha School in North Darfur participated in an event organized by UNAMID to advocate against the recruitment and use of child soldiers. Photo by Emadeldin Rijal, UNAMID.

On 26 November 2014, as part of its Darfur-wide campaign geared to prevent the recruitment of children as soldiers, the African Union-United Nations Mission in Darfur (UNAMID) reached out to the Masteriha community, North Darfur, through an event attended by more than 1,000 men, women and school children.

During the event, the pupils of the Masteriha mixed school performed songs pertinent to the occasion as

a show of solidarity with issues related to the protection of children. UNAMID, accompanied by members of the Sudan Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration Commission (SDDRC) and UNICEF, distributed caps, scarves, T-shirts and vests with messages promoting peace in Darfur, the protection of children and against the use of child soldiers.

“We believe that with your continued support, child protection is in prog-

ress,” remarked Boubacar Dieng, Head of UNAMID’s Children Protection Unit, in his speech at the event. “The protection of children will not be complete without peace in Darfur,” he said.

Tribal leader Sheikh Musa Hilal appreciated the launching of the campaign in the area and reiterated the Command Order he issued on 26 July 2013, prohibiting communities under his leadership to use children in tribal clashes. He also reiterated his commitment to a Com-

munity-based Strategic Plan against child soldiering initiated by him on 6 October 2014, which was endorsed by leaders from the Beni Hussein, Tamma, Fur, Gimir and Awlad Janoub tribes.

Sheikh Hilal outlined that he has been working on social reconciliations at the grassroots level in order to create tribal harmony. “When it comes to peaceful coexistence, we have had a number of conferences in different areas for the sake of stability and security in

Darfur,” he said. Additionally, he called on the humanitarian community, UNAMID and the UN agencies to engage in further activities in the field of development in the region.

The Head of UNAMID Sector North, Mr. Mohamed El-Amine Souef, emphasized that the Mission’s mandate is focused on protecting civilians, facilitating the delivery of humanitarian assistance and contributing to peace and reconciliation efforts. ■

UNAMID Acting Head Visits East and South Darfur States



On 20 November, the Acting Head of UNAMID, Abiodun Bashua, met with native administration leaders in El Daein, East Darfur. Photo by Abdulrasheed Yakubu, UNAMID.

From 18-20 November, as part of his regional tour to follow up on coordination and cooperation between the Mission and the states’ authorities to achieve peace in Darfur, the Acting Joint Special Representative (AJSR) of the African Union-United Nations Mission in Darfur (UNAMID) and Joint Chief Mediator a.i., Mr. Abiodun Bashua, visited Nyala in South Darfur and El Daein in East.

In a meeting with the South Darfur Wali (Governor), Adam Mahmoud Jar Alnabi, on 18 November, they discussed the security situation, development programmes and voluntary return of internally displaced persons (IDPs) to their original villages. Mr. Bashua urged the federal and local authorities to bring perpetrators who were involved in attacking and killing UNAMID peacekeep-

ers to justice. He also called for unhindered movement of the Mission to all parts of Darfur. He commended the collaboration between the state, UN Country Team and UNAMID in South Darfur.

In El Daein, the Acting JSR met with the Wali of East Darfur, Altaib Abdulkarim Ahmed, and the Minister of Reconstruction and Infrastructure at Darfur Regional Authority, Taje-

din Bashir Nyam. They discussed the ongoing activities of the Mission in the state and further support that UNAMID could provide in terms of capacity building, local mediation and reconciliation activities, especially for the forthcoming conference between the Ma’aliya and the Rezigat, expected to take place in December.

During his visit to East Darfur, Mr. Bashua visited Khor Omer camp for internally displaced persons (IDPs) where he met with representatives of the IDPs and the refugees from South Sudan living there and listened to their concerns.

The Acting Head of UNAMID also met with native administration leaders who requested UNAMID to provide training opportunities geared toward advancing peace advocacy and logistics. Mr. Bashua reiterated that UNAMID is committed to support the restoration of the important role of the native administration within the limits of its resources. ■

UNAMID Establishes Women’s Protection Network

In Darfur, the increasing attention paid to displaced women in the context of United Nations’ emphasis on women, peace and security has had a positive impact on their overall status. Against this backdrop UNAMID’s Gender Advisory Unit (GAU) has established the Women’s Protection Network. The Network is primarily aimed at receiving timely information concerning women’s protection needs. This leads to the development of appropriate protection measures; raises awareness among local communities on women’s rights and helps combat sexual and gender-based violence along with encouraging dialogues between women and the Mission’s various

components as well as UN agencies and government institutions.

The objective is to create a forum for women to discuss their protection needs so as to ensure that a mechanism for referring gender-based violence victims to service providers is in place.

“The Women’s Protection Network was established to create champions of protection from within the displaced peoples’ camps,” said Ms. Yegerawork Angagaw, Senior Gender Officer, UNAMID GAU. Hence, UNAMID GAU is committed to empower women leaders who will watch over the overall safety and security of the women living in such camps. These women leaders are also expected to promote

and engage in the peace process and in camp management.

The Network has been instrumental in bringing together women across all age groups, irrespective of community or tribal affiliations, to discuss and share their views on protection issues and seek effective ways of utilizing existing response and prevention mechanisms through a well-developed early warning, preparedness and response strategy. It has also enabled women’s participation in different areas within the IDP camps, including traditional mediation mechanisms, decision-making as well as maintaining a culture of peace. The women not only represent their respec-

tive communities, they also represent their villages of origin.

The Network, present in all Darfur states except El Daein, East Darfur, is composed of displaced women’s groups from different backgrounds and tribal affiliations. Members of the Network meet regularly to address issues of gender based-violence including monitoring and reporting cases of forcible sexual assault and abuse among women and girls.

Ms. Angagaw explains that since the establishment of these networks across Darfur, the Mission’s Gender Advisory Section has become a “hotline,” through which protection issues and concerns are channeled to relevant stakeholders. ■

Demobilisation of Former Combatants Begins in North Darfur

On 12 November 2014, the Sudan Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration Commission (SDDRC) marked the official launch of the demobilisation exercise for members of the Justice and Equality Movement-Sudan as well as the signatories to the Darfur Peace Agreement. The event, which began on 2 November, is a month-long exercise for more than 500 ex-combatants from JEM-Sudan and 200 former combatants from the Darfur Peace Agreement—SLA-Mustafa Terab, SLA-Mother Wing and JEM-Peace Wing—who were yet to undergo the demobilisation process.

The process began with a briefing regarding the reintegration procedure, verification of administrative documents, a medical screening and the provision of identification cards. The participants were also given a cash payment in local currency as well as food

rations for three months.

The occasion was attended by State Minister in the Presidency, Fadul Abdallah Fadul, the Head of the Darfur Unit, General (Rtd) Abdallah Mohammed Abdul, UNAMID Deputy Force Commander, Major General Balla Keita, the Deputy Wali, Adam Mohammed Hamid Nahla and the Qatari Ambassador. The event was also attended by senior representatives from the Government of Sudan, UNAMID and UNDP.

In his remarks, UNAMID Deputy Force Commander, Major General Keita, expressed appreciation for the Government of Sudan, the State of Qatar and the leadership of JEM-Sudan for their combined efforts toward achieving this important milestone. He reaffirmed the Mission’s continued efforts to provide support to the signatories of the Doha Document for Peace in Darfur (DDPD)



On 2 November 2014, former combatants from the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM)-Sudan participate in a demobilisation programme organized by the Sudan Disarmament Demobilisation and Reintegration Commission (SDDRC) with support from UNAMID, UNDP and WFP. Photo by Hamid Abdulsalam, UNAMID.

and the implementation of the final security arrangements in line with the DDPD.

On his part, the Qatari Ambassador, Mr. Rashid Al-Noaymi, expressed his government’s commitment to the cause of sustainable peace in Darfur as well as to the implementation of ongoing projects in the region.

The disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) programme is part of the final security arrangements included in the DDPD agreement which was signed by the Liberation and Justice Movement and the Government of Sudan in 2011. ■

UNAMID Acting Head Meets Qatari Deputy Prime Minister

On 4 November 2014, the African Union-United Nations Acting Joint Special Representative (JSR) and Joint Chief Mediator a.i. for Darfur, Mr. Abiodun Bashua, held a meeting with the Deputy Prime Minister (DPM) of Qatar, H.E. Ahmed bin Abdullah Al-Mahmoud, in Doha.

During the meeting, the Acting JSR briefed the DPM on the status of implementation of the Doha Document for Peace in Darfur, the overall security situation in Darfur, as well as on the ongoing efforts to facilitate negotiations between the Government of Sudan and Darfuri armed movements.

The DPM reiterated Qatar's and his personal com-

mitment and engagement with regard to Darfur and said that Qatar will continue to support all efforts for peace, stability and development in Darfur.

As part of the outcome of the visit, the DPM authorized the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the State of Qatar and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) for the commencement of the Darfur Internal Dialogue and Consultation (DIDC). The MoU was signed by the UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator for Sudan, Mr. Ali Al-Za'tari, who accompanied Mr. Bashua to Doha.



On 4 November 2014, Mr. Ali Al-Za'tari, RC/HC for Sudan (on behalf of UNAMID/UNDP) and Dr. Ahmed Meraikhi, Director of International Development, Department of the Foreign Ministry, on behalf of the State of Qatar, sign the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the State of Qatar and UNDP for the commencement of the Darfur Internal Dialogue and Consultation in Doha. Mr. Al-Za'tari was accompanied by UNAMID Acting JSR Abiodun Bashua. UN Photo.

Three Peacekeepers Attacked, Killed in Korma, North Darfur



On 19 October 2014, UNAMID paid its last respects to the three Ethiopian peacekeepers who lost their lives in an attack by an unidentified group near Korma, North Darfur, on 16 October. The memorial ceremony took place at Mission headquarters in El Fasher, North Darfur, and was led by the UNAMID Force Commander, Lt. General Paul Mella, and attended by outgoing Joint Special Representative Mohamed Ibn Chambas, Acting JSR Abiodun Bashua and other senior Mission personnel. Photo by Hamid Abdulsalam, UNAMID.

On 16 October 2014, two UNAMID peacekeepers were killed and one seriously injured by a group of unidentified armed men in Korma, North Darfur. The injured soldier later succumbed to his wounds and

died in Khartoum. The incident occurred when a patrol of Ethiopian peacekeepers guarding a water borehole came under sudden attack. The perpetrators seized a patrol vehicle and fled the scene. Acting Joint Special Repre-

sentative Abidoun Bashua, a.i. expressed his deep sadness. "I strongly condemn this heinous crime against our peacekeepers," he said. "This reminds us of the great price everyone pays for the absence of peace. UNAMID person-

nel, as many others before them, lost their lives while attempting to bring peace to the people of Darfur."

The unfortunate incident was reported to the Sudanese Foreign Minister. The Acting JSR called on the Government of Sudan to act swiftly in bringing the perpetrators to justice. "An attack on peacekeepers constitutes a war crime is punishable under international criminal law," he added. Mr. Bashua extended the Mission's and his own deepest condolences to the family and colleagues of the late peacekeepers, and to the Government and people of the Federal Republic of Ethiopia.

This incident brings the number of peacekeepers who lost their lives in hostile action in Darfur to 61 since the inception of the Mission in December 2007.

Tripartite Meeting on UNAMID Discusses Operational and Security Issues

On 27 September 2014, the 18th meeting of the Tripartite Coordination Mechanism on UNAMID's mandate took place at the UN headquarters in New York. During the meeting, delegates from the African Union, United Nations and Government of Sudan welcomed progress made in the implementation of the Mission's mandate as well as the cooperation received from the host government.

The delegations were headed by Ambassador Sana'a Hamad Awad, Acting Under-Secretary of the Sudanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs; Ambassador Smail Chergui, AU Commissioner for Peace and Security; Mr. Hervé Ladsous, UN Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations; Ms. Ameerah Haq, UN Under-Secretary-General for Field Support; and Mr. Mohamed Ibn Chambas, AU-UN Joint Special Representative for Darfur.

The participants welcomed Security Council Resolution 2173 (2014), the reprioritization of UNAMID's strategic priorities following Resolution 2148 (2014) and the forthcoming



On 27 September 2014, representatives from the Government of Sudan, African Union, United Nations and UNAMID are pictured here during the tripartite meeting in New York. AU Photo.

discussions on UNAMID's exit strategy on the basis of progress on the ground and in coordination with the United Nations Country Team.

The forum looked forward to further work toward building an environment for recovery and development in Darfur. The participants welcomed the initiative of the inclusive national dialogue launched by H.E. Mr. Omar Hassan Ahmed Al Bashir, President of the Republic of the Sudan, on 27 January 2014.

The meeting reviewed thoroughly the progress made so far on security issues, UNAMID's

deployment, issuance of visas and challenges in importation and exportation of goods for UNAMID's operational needs. The AU and UN urged the Government of Sudan and UNAMID to increase coordination and work at the technical level to expeditiously solve these issues.

Ms. Haq briefed the gathering on measures taken with regard to the Ebola outbreak and the JSR assured participants that UNAMID continues to issue regular guidance to its personnel on prevention and precautions regarding Ebola. Participants urged UNAMID, the UN Mission for

Ebola Emergency Response, the UN Country Team and other relevant agencies to take necessary assistance in this regard.

The participants thanked Mr. Chambas for his dedication, commitment and outstanding contributions to the peace process in Darfur during his tenure as Joint Special Representative and wished him success in his new posting.

The next meeting of the Tripartite Coordination Mechanism is scheduled to take place in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, in January 2015.



On 23 October 2014, to help rebuild confidence in conflict-affected communities across Darfur, UNAMID's Police component hosted the final round of a volleyball tournament for secondary school girls at the Abu Shouk camp for internally displaced persons in El Fasher, North Darfur. Photo by Mohamad Almahady, UNAMID.

“‘Robustness,’ for UNAMID’s military peacekeepers means to effectively protect civilians.” —Force Commander Lt. General Paul Mella

UNAMID Force Commander, Lt. General Paul Ignace Mella, talks about the dedication of UNAMID’s military peacekeepers to furthering the cause of peace in Darfur despite severe operational challenges.

BY PAUL OMALLA

In July 2007, the United Nations Security Council adopted Resolution 1769, establishing the African Union-United Nations Mission in Darfur (UNAMID), the largest and the first collaborative UN peacekeeping operation. Since the initial blue-helmeted troops set foot in Sudan’s western region, UNAMID has been carrying out complex mandated task in a vast, conflict-affected territory in the absence of a comprehensive peace agreement and in an environment fraught with operational as well as infrastructural challenges.

In 2013, Lt. General Paul Ignace Mella of Tanzania was appointed to the position of UNAMID’s Force Commander, heading the Mission’s military component. Some 13,000 military personnel work under his leadership in 35 locations across Darfur. In this insightful interview, Lt. General Mella speaks about the immensely sensitive and challenging work of UNAMID’s military peacekeepers, especially with regard to protection of the civilian populations of Darfur who are the victims of the decade-long conflict that has decimated the region.

VOD: How would you describe the security situation in Darfur? According to you, what are the primary factors that have contributed to the current state of affairs here?

Lt. General Mella: The security situation in Darfur is relatively calm but, at the same time, un-

predictable. You may have a few quiet days but even a single incident can spark off violence between communities. For example, something as commonplace as stealing cattle can lead to serious inter-tribal clashes.

When it comes to armed movements, the past few months have been calm. We usually see a decrease in armed activities during the rainy season and its immediate aftermath.

In my opinion, a key factor affecting the security situation is an increase in criminality. The proliferation of small arms is very high in Darfur. Porous borders with neighbouring countries such as Chad, the Central African Republic and South Sudan makes it easy for unsavoury elements from different countries to make inroads. Additionally, the difficult geographical terrain across Darfur makes some areas inaccessible for law enforcement professionals.

In the course of its history, Darfur has experienced much upheaval—massive displacements, aerial bombardment in certain areas in the west and north, clashes between Government of Sudan forces and armed movements, and so forth. Since the conflict here has yet to be resolved and a comprehensive peace agreement has not been signed, the security situation continues to fluctuate.

VOD: Have there been any positive developments in lessening the occurrence of



On 3 September 2014, UNAMID’s Force Commander, Lt. General Paul Mella, is pictured attending the final security arrangements for the Justice and Equality Movement-Sudan (JEM-Sudan) in El Fasher, North Darfur, which started with the assessment and registration of heavy equipment and weapons. According to Lt. General Mella, porous borders with neighbouring countries contribute to the proliferation of small arms in Darfur. Photo by Hamid Abdulsalam, UNAMID.



On 20 May 2014 UNAMID Force Commander Lt. General Paul Mella is pictured with members of the local community during his tour of the Khor Abeche Team Site in South Darfur to assess the situation of displaced Darfuris settled in the vicinity of the Mission's base there. A spate of violence in March 2014 had led to approximately 3,000 people taking refuge inside the UNAMID compound in the area. Photo by Sharon Lukunka, UNAMID.

displacements on account of inter-tribal clashes?

Lt. General Mella: While certain areas, such as El Sereif in North Darfur, still have intense disputes between members of different tribes, I believe that, while tensions still exist, the magnitude and intensity of such conflicts have decreased. In the case of El Sereif, the problems arose on account of the small-scale gold mining activities taking place in the area. Two tribes disputed the division of the proceeds from the mining enterprise. This led to large-scale displacements from the area. Protection of civilians being a core mandated duty for UNAMID peacekeepers, we deployed a temporary operating base in the El Sereif area; over time this base has been strengthened.

UNAMID troops deployed in El Sereif now conduct regular patrols to monitor the security situation and also

to intervene preemptively whenever an inter-tribal clash is imminent.

The Mission's military component has conducted similar, proactive interventions in the Kalma camp for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in South Darfur. Kalma is one of the largest IDP camps in the region and the early deployment of UNAMID military peacekeepers raised confidence regarding the Mission among local communities, enabled us to carefully monitor and work with other Mission components such as the Civil Affairs Section to defuse potential security threats, and created a conducive environment for humanitarian actors to provide necessary relief services to the needy.

VOD: With the recent review of the Mission's uniformed personnel, the military component has been reduced. How has this affected the component's performance?

Lt. General Mella: The review of uniformed personnel was done in 2012 and we reduced strength from 19 battalions to 16. The Mission's military component performs a diverse range of tasks—conducting patrols, providing protection to vulnerable populations and performing support functions such as providing medical care, engineering support and water drilling expertise.

The military component has positioned hospital battalions in Nyala, South Darfur, El Geneina, West Darfur and Kabkabiya, North Darfur. We have the Chinese Engineering Company in South Darfur and the Pakistani Engineering Company in West Darfur. Additionally, there is the Gambian Company and the Kenyan Military Police, also in support roles.

Support functions enable troops on the frontlines to better perform their

mandated tasks. For example, the Engineering Companies construct roads, bridges and similar infrastructure, which increase troop mobility across Darfur. Medical troops provide healthcare support, another essential prerequisite.

Therefore, when the time came to reduce troops, we chose to let go of three battalions from the troops on ground. In addition to this, we sent one battalion to South Sudan when the crisis there was at its peak.

However, I'm happy to say that the contingency measures we put into place to combat these reductions have effectively filled any gaps that may have been created, to the extent that none of the UNAMID Team Sites across Darfur have been operationally affected. We have been working with increased efficiency despite the reduction in numbers. Moreover, we have prioritized areas where UNAMID's presence is vitally required on the ground.

VOD: Can you tell us a bit about the actual impact of UNAMID military peacekeepers on the ground in Darfur?

Lt. General Mella: UNAMID's military component has a tangible and much-appreciated contribution to the implementation of the Mission's mandate. Military peacekeepers in Darfur are deployed in 35 Team Sites which cover areas where innocent civilians and displaced communities require the most protection. In case of any emergency notification from our well-developed early response system, we are able to send in troops to the affected areas in advance to defuse tensions.

In the event that violence has already erupted in a certain area, we instantly initiate dialogues with the affected communities and instruct them to assemble in certain location within their villages where we are able to safeguard them.

We have also developed a contingency plan according to which every Team Site has a secure location on its periphery—this gives civilians a place to flee to in case we are not able to reach them.

There are some 18,000 displaced Darfuris living in the vicinity of the Korma Team Site, North Darfur. Similarly, the Mellit, El Sereif and Khor Abeche Team Sites have many thousands taking shelter in their buffer zones.



On 1 August 2013, UNAMID Force Commander, Lt. General Paul Mella is pictured saluting the Guard of Honour marking his commencement of duties as the head of UNAMID's military component at the Mission's Headquarters in El Fasher, North Darfur. Military peacekeepers in Darfur are deployed in 35 Team Sites covering areas where innocent civilians and displaced communities require the most protection. Photo by Sojoud Elgarrai, UNAMID.

“UNAMID's military component has a tangible and much-appreciated contribution to the implementation of the Mission's overall mandate.”

As recently as last month, a surge of violence in Labado, East Darfur, saw a number of displaced civilians approaching the Team Site there. It is worth mentioning here that at every Team Site, the Mission's military peacekeepers render emergency humanitarian aid to the conflict affected such provision of food, water and medical aid as well as evacuation of the seriously wounded.

VOD: Apart from protection of civilians, in your opinion, what other areas has the Mission's military component been able to contribute to in Darfur?

Lt. General Mella: I think one of the primary and pivotal support functions performed by UNAMID's military component is the provision of escorts to humanitarian actors such as the World Food Programme, for example. Nutrition is essential for victims of violence and conflict to survive and work toward rebuilding their lives. Therefore, I consider the facilitation of humanitarian access to be an immensely significant function performed by our troops.

Similarly, as I have mentioned earlier, our Engineering Companies have con-

tributed greatly to fortifying the infrastructure in Darfur through construction of roads, bridges, and the new airport in El Geneina, West Darfur.

Each Team Site has a programme to support the civilians living within their area of operations. Some go as far as constructing schools, dispensaries and other community facilities through the Mission's Quick Impact Projects (QIPs) programme. Through initiatives like these we win the hearts and minds of local communities and contribute to creating hope for a better future for the people living here.

VOD: Could you tell us about how the military component can increase its efficacy on the ground?

Lt. General Mella: In terms of equipment, military utility tactical helicopters will enable the Mission to respond timely whenever there is an imminent threat to civilians. These helicopters will also enable us to better assess security and conduct aerial patrols, thereby ensuring we cover larger areas; they will also help deter criminal elements.



On 30 June 2014, UNAMID troops from Tanzania conduct a routine patrol in a camp for internally displaced persons (IDPs), in the vicinity of the Mission's compound in Khor Abeche, South Darfur. UNAMID troops deployed across Darfur conduct regular patrols to monitor the security situation and also to intervene preemptively whenever violence is imminent. Photo by Albert González Farran, UNAMID.

Additionally, full cooperation with the Government of Sudan will increase the overall efficiency and impact of UNAMID's military movements.

Internally, we need to improve pre-deployment training procedures for some troop contributing countries (TCCs) in order to ensure that all new units are able to adapt to the conditions here without causing themselves physical or psychological harm.

VOD: How much of an issue are access denials to UNAMID patrols and what can be done to avoid such restrictions?

Lt. General Mella: On occasion, access denials do pose operational challenges for the Mission's military peacekeepers. Our mandate clearly states that UNAMID is tasked with the protection of civilians without prejudice to the responsibility of the Government of Sudan.

In order to avoid such operational roadblocks, we have set into place procedures by which, if denied permission to access a certain area, the patrol in question should engage with the local authorities. In such an eventuality, we have a system by which we contact, through a liaison of-

“When the Mission's military personnel step out to perform their daily duties, they must be ready to sacrifice their lives in order to protect those in need and serve the cause of peace in Darfur.”

ficer of the Government of Sudan, the appropriate authorities and request them to grant our patrol the necessary freedom of movement. These mechanisms have worked quite well.

We document denials and bring them up at the Tripartite Meeting held every three months; this is a useful forum which brings together the Government of Sudan, the UN and the African Union on a common platform to discuss relevant issues.

In terms of the way forward, it is my opinion that cooperation with the Government of Sudan authorities is a key factor. The host country has the primary responsibility of protecting its citizens and, therefore, greater collaboration between UNAMID and the Government of Sudan will definitely yield very positive results.

VOD: Finally, what exactly does the term “robustness” entail for military peacekeepers in Darfur?

Lt. General Mella: “Robustness,” for UNAMID's military peacekeepers means to effectively protect civilians, which is the core mandate of the Mission. It alludes to the fact that military peacekeepers in Darfur need to be well organized and cannot watch innocent people suffer without actively seeking to safeguard them.

UNAMID's military peacekeepers continuously engage with local populations through more than 100 daily patrols. When the Mission's military personnel step out to perform their daily duties, they must be ready to sacrifice their lives in order to protect those in need and serve the cause of peace in Darfur. ■

CHILDREN

Displaced Children in Camps Remain Hopeful

Many years of conflict have resulted in the proliferation of camps for internally displaced persons and an education system that lacks basic services. Against this backdrop, Darfur is struggling to meet the needs of its children.

BY SHARON LUKUNKA



On 30 October 2014, Faiha Abdulgader, 11, is pictured playing with her siblings at the Abu Shouk camp for displaced persons. Faiha, when asked what she would like to achieve after completing her education, says she wants to be an engineer and aspires to rebuild the Abu Shouk camp, construct proper roads and install streetlights. Photo by Hamid Abdulsalam, UNAMID.

Like thousands of other children in Darfur, 11-year-old Faiha Abdulgader and two of her siblings were born in the Abu Shouk camp for displaced persons, located on the outskirts of El Fasher town in North Darfur. Her parents, along with innumerable other families, fled the Tawila area in North Darfur following the outbreak of the conflict in 2003.

Mohammed Tayeb, 14, and Mahir Ahmed, 13, students at the Al Salaam

Primary School for Boys narrate a similar story. Mohammed and his family moved from Tawila to the Al Salam camp when he was just two years old, while Mahir, also accompanied by his family, arrived at the camp from Korma, North Darfur. Like most children caught in the epicenter of the conflict here, they have no recollection of the events leading to the displacement; their knowledge is based on stories narrated by parents and elders. “My

mother told me that there was a war going on so we had to leave our real home,” says Mohammed.

Accounts like these are not unusual in Darfur, where 10 years of conflict have taken a heavy toll on the lives of the children caught in the crossfire, robbing them of a healthy, secure existence. While attempting to escape from recurring violence in their villages of origin, families and children are often exposed to great



On 30 October 2014, photographed here is Kultoum, a young displaced woman in the Abu Shouk camp in El Fasher, North Darfur. Most displaced families survive under severe financial constraints and are unable to afford a proper education for their children. Photo by Hamid Abdulsalam, UNAMID.

“As Police Advisers, we constantly try to dissuade families from allowing their children to beg in the marketplaces of Darfur and to enroll them in school instead.”

—Theresia Bir Che

physical danger. Gunfire, shelling and unexploded ordnance pose direct threats, and they often have to walk across great distances for days on end with limited quantities of food and water. Children typically are the worst sufferers in such circumstances, at times becoming acutely malnourished, prone to illness, and even death. Girls, especially, are vulnerable to sexual abuse during displacement.

According to the office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for children in armed conflicts, around the globe, an estimated 11.2 million to 13.7 million children have been internally displaced as a result of armed conflict. Forced displacement uproots children and youth

at a time when their lives most need stability.

Post displacement, families in IDP camps are faced with an economy that leaves them with no means of making a living, an infrastructure that is in disrepair, and an education system that lacks basic services. Conditions in these camps are difficult; a lack of basic amenities such as proper health-care, sanitation, housing, potable water and proper security increases the vulnerability of those living here, especially women and children. Most displaced families survive under severe financial constraints and are unable to afford a proper education for their children.

The hardships faced by individual

families often lead to situations where children work on the streets—washing cars, fetching tea or performing other small chores for a nominal payment—in an attempt to contribute to the family income. Theresia Bir Che, a UNAMID Police Adviser and one of the dedicated officers who accompany UNAMID’s patrol teams throughout Darfur each day to talk to displaced children and encourage them to continue their education, reveals that many children have resorted to begging on the streets. “As Police Advisers, we constantly try to dissuade families from allowing their children to beg in the marketplaces of Darfur and to enroll them in school instead,” says Ms. Bir Che.

Current statistics reveal that in the Abu Shouk camp on the outskirts of El Fasher town, for instance, there are 56 primary schools with more than 41,000 students and eight secondary schools with 6,500 enrolled students; these schools are supported by the Ministry of Education, North Darfur, in terms of providing teachers.

However, for each child who receives some form of education there are many more existing in unsecured locations and, consequently, vulnerable to abductions, recruitment into armed movements, exploitation and abuse.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child is the first legally binding international treaty to incorporate a full range of human rights for children. The UN General Assembly adopted the Convention and opened it for signatures on 20 November 1989. The Convention sets out children’s rights in 54 articles that include the right to survival; the right to develop to the fullest; the right to protection from harmful influences, abuse and exploitation; and the right to participate fully in family, cultural and social life.

In many conflict-ridden countries, peacekeeping missions are the largest actor on the ground and their contribution is vital to protecting children. The Security Council has addressed this issue since 1999 and the protection of children in conflict has been included in the mandates of [peacekeeping operations](#) since 2001. In the past ten years peacekeeping operations have helped release thousands of child soldiers and advocate for legislative reform

In 1990, Sudan signed the UN Convention, and in 2010 signed into law its own Child Protection Act. According to the Sudanese Child Protection Act of 2010, the Sudanese States are responsible for the care and protection of children, and must facilitate the infrastructure for their proper upbringing, from all sides, in the framework of freedom, human dignity and spiritual and social values, and in a healthy environment. Chapter II, paragraph 23 of the Act states that vagrancy of children shall not be deemed an offence punishable by law. All Sudanese states have adopted constitutions that contain provisions for legislative frameworks aimed at ensuring the welfare and protection of children in accordance with provisions contained in the National Interim Constitution of the Republic of

the Sudan, 2005.

Within this framework, UNAMID has deployed civilian, military and police peacekeepers who interact regularly with displaced populations across Darfur, sensitizing them on significant issues including the importance of education, hygiene, harmful practices such as early marriages and female genital mutilation and so forth.

Additionally, UNAMID’s Child Protection Unit (CPU) has been working with children directly affected by the conflict and with Sudanese authorities to set up specific programmes to provide protection for displaced children. CPU also monitors and reports violations committed by parties to the conflict against Darfuri children. In this regard, the Mission has welcomed commitments made by several armed movements to refrain from recruitment of children into their ranks.

Moreover, the Mission, along with local government institutions, UN agencies and international and

national non-governmental organizations, is part of the Child Protection Working Group chaired by the State Council for Child Welfare; this body is designed to identify and address issues concerning children such as education, violations committed against children and street children in Darfur.

Another example is UNAMID’s work with Sudanese Police in providing guidance and training for the newly established Family and Child Protection Units, which have been rolled out across Darfur as subunits set up in Sudanese Police stations to address the needs of families and children.

During her visit to Sudan and Darfur last year, the UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, Ms. Valerie Amos, saw firsthand the humanitarian situation in Darfur; some 300,000 people were displaced here in 2013 according to UN estimates. This figure is higher than the total number of people displaced in the preceding couple of years combined.

Ms. Amos urged more sustainable

“We cannot forget these children. They are the future of Darfur and of Sudan.”

—Valerie Amos

On 30 October 2014, 11-year-old Faiha Abdulgader, is pictured at the Abu Shouk camp for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in El Fasher, North Darfur. Like Faiha, many children across Darfur have been born in IDP camps. 10 years of conflict in the region have taken a heavy toll on the lives of the children caught in the crossfire, robbing them of a healthy, secure existence. Photo by Hamid Abdulsalam, UNAMID.



support for displaced populations, many of whom have been living in camps for a decade. While visiting the Zam Zam camp on the outskirts of El Fasher, North Darfur, the Undersecretary General highlighted the plight of thousands of children born in IDP camps. “We cannot forget these children. They are the future of Darfur and of Sudan,” she averred.

For its part, the North Darfur Council for Child Welfare is primarily responsible for planning policies on child protection in coordination with the National Council for Strategic Planning. Ms. Khadija Abdulmajid, Director, Council of Child Welfare, says that organization works

in partnership with local institutions, the UN and international and national agencies to address the needs of these children and their families.

Ms. Abdulmajid also reveals that the Council has established more than 20 centres which provide psychosocial support to community members, including children, affected by the ongoing conflict. These centres are located in different localities and displaced persons’ camps in North Darfur.

While such programmes have begun to make an impact, the constant influx people to the larger towns and cities across Darfur has placed a burden on the region’s already over-

extended infrastructure. Though the Government of Sudan, UNAMID and other relevant stakeholders are continuing their efforts to ameliorate the hardships faced by displaced Darfuris, the conflict-affected are eking out a meagre living by working in nearby farms or selling goods on the local market, to help support their families and send their children to school.

The children living in IDP camps, however, remain hopeful. Faiha, when asked what she would like to achieve after completing her education, says she wants to be an engineer and aspires to rebuild the Abu Shouk camp, construct proper roads and install streetlights. Similarly, Mohammed says he would like to study medicine and help people in need. Others like them also speak of their professional aspirations once they grow up, despite the hardships they face on a daily basis. As Ms. Bir Che explains, “Children in camps are deeply affected by the situation in Darfur, yet most of them say that they believe completing their education will change the course of their life and ensure a better future.”

“Children in camps are deeply affected by the situation in Darfur, yet most of them say that they believe completing their education will change the course of their life and ensure a better future.”

— Theresia Bir Che

On 30 October 2014, a 22-year-old mother, Firouz El Fadel, is pictured with one of her children at the Abu Shouk camp for the displaced in El Fasher, North Darfur. Ms. Fadel was married when she was only 14 to a man 11 years her senior; her first pregnancy was at the age of 17. She currently has two children. Families in IDP camps are faced with an economy that leaves them with no means of making a living, an infrastructure that is in disrepair, and an education system that lacks basic services. Photo by Hamid Abdulsalam, UNAMID.



On 12 November 2014, the landscape of West Darfur's capital, El Geneina is photographed here. Located some 27 kilometers east of the Chadian-Sudanese border, El Geneina is an important transit point connecting the West and East coasts of Africa. Photo by Hamid Abdulsalam, UNAMID.

El Geneina: A Stable Society in the Midst of Conflict

A strategic geographical location and overarching unity among local communities has led to the development of a vibrant economy and enviable social cohesion in El Geneina, the capital of West Darfur.

BY EMADELDIN RIJAL

Despite the decade-long conflict in Darfur, El Geneina, the capital of West Darfur exhibits a vibrant pattern of socio-economic development. Known across the region for its natural beauty, El Geneina is divided almost exactly in half by the river Kaja and, according to the 2010 census, is

home to a population of some 170,000 people. The town's chief attractions are its numerous verdant gardens and areas such as Jebel Sultan, where families are often seen enjoying a relaxed outing during the weekends.

It is hardly unusual then, that El Geneina sees an influx of visitors from

the different states of Darfur, especially during the rainy season when the Kaja valley gets flooded. “Coming to the Kaja valley, during the rainy season, is an experience that most Darfuris desire,” says Mohammed Siddiq, a resident of the El Shatei area in El Geneina, adding that the landscape sur-



On 12 November 2014, the landscape of West Darfur's capital, El Geneina is photographed here. Located some 27 kilometers east of the Chadian-Sudanese border, El Geneina is an important transit point connecting the West and East coasts of Africa. Photo by Hamid Abdulsalam, UNAMID.

“West Darfur exhibits more unified communities. These, in turn, create secure conditions that are conducive for law and order mechanisms, such as the police and military, to function at optimum levels. Criminal incidents are in number here and there is great communal harmony.”
—Haider Gali-Koma

rounding the town is one of the most beautiful sights across the region.

While most of Darfur today is characterized by massive population displacements, infrastructural disrepair and a fragile economy, West Darfur, in general, and El Geneina, in particular, is perhaps one of the most stable, vibrant areas in the region. “West Darfur is one of the States that has benefited the most from the momentum for development created by the Doha Document for Peace in Darfur (DDPD),”

says Mr. Haider Gali-Koma, Governor, West Darfur.

Additionally, Mr. Gali-Koma reveals that West Darfur has not witnessed any major armed violence or intense tribal disputes in at least the past five years; this, according to him, has resulted in the creation of a more cohesive social fabric. “West Darfur exhibits more unified communities. These, in turn, create secure conditions that are conducive for law and order mechanisms, such as the police

and military, to function at optimum levels. Criminal incidents are few in number and there is great communal harmony,” he adds.

These factors cannot be overlooked when one considers the ongoing economic and infrastructural development that characterizes the capital of the state. Located some 27 kilometers east of the Chadian-Sudanese border, El Geneina is an important transit point connecting the West and East coasts of Africa. In January 2010, border tensions between Sudan and Chad led to the establishment of the joint Border Control Force to curb infiltration into either country. The Force's rotating leadership is headquartered in El Geneina. The deployment of the Border Control Force has positively impacted the security situation in El Geneina and surrounding areas positively, leading to an upsurge of trade.

Mr. Gali-Koma reveals that plans are underway to construct a free market zone in El Geneina; the foundation stone for this project has already

been laid. This free zone will increase trade exchanges between Sudan and West African countries such as Nigeria, Niger, Cameroon, and so forth. The rise in exports and imports, he says, will undoubtedly result in greater economic prosperity for West Darfur. “I believe that this area will see a lot more development and many projects will be initiated as long as there is stability,” he states.

El Geneina's reputation as a strategic trading hub has been enhanced by infrastructural improvements, especially the construction of a new airport, the Sebeira Airport, which connects it directly to the federal capital of Sudan, Khartoum, as well as other major Darfuri towns such as Nyala, South Darfur, and El Fasher, North Darfur. “The new airport in El Geneina facilitates mass movement to areas of Darfur that would, otherwise, be too distant. This is a boon, especially on account of the conflict and the security risks associated with road travel,” says Mr. Rashid Ali, a resident of El Geneina town.

Additionally, the state capital also boasts of new roads linking it to Zalingei, Central Darfur, while construction is underway on a road connecting it to Adre in Chad. There is also an ini-

tiative to construct a railway that will tie the main town of El Geneina with other parts of Sudan and Chad.

Another important developmental activity worth mentioning here is the Kaja River Valley Project. The brain-child of the Darfur Regional Authority (DRA), this project is aimed at addressing traditional disputes between farmers and pastoralists in West Darfur by constructing dams and launching water harvest strategies. The project, upon implementation, is expected to uplift the local economy, enable the ideal use of water and foster stability among communities.

On its part, the African Union-United Nations Mission in Darfur (UNAMID) has played a pivotal role in supporting the creation of infrastructure in El Geneina. UNAMID supported the construction of the new airport by providing a layer of asphalt for the runway, a mobile air traffic control tower, fire fighting vehicles and a lighting system.

Pictured here is the power plant in El Geneina, West Darfur, which supplies electricity to the entire town. According to the Mr. Haider Gali-Koma, Governor, West Darfur, this plant is likely to be connected to the national electrical line. However, the plant currently uses large electric generators and solar panels to provide electricity. Photo by Hamid Abdulsalam, UNAMID.





On 3 September 2013, a truck loaded with items for trade in the customs office waits for clearance in El Geneina, West Darfur, only a few kilometers from the Sudanese-Chadian border. Plans are underway to construct a free market zone in El Geneina to increase trade exchanges between Sudan and West African countries such as Nigeria, Niger, Cameroon, and so forth. Photo by Albert González Farran, UNAMID.

“The new airport in El Geneina facilitates mass movement to areas of Darfur that would, otherwise, be too distant. This is a boon, especially on account of the conflict and the security risks associated with road travel.”

— Rashid Ali

Additionally, the Mission has also worked toward developing skills within the local populations here through its Community-based Labour-intensive Projects (CLIPS) programme. These CLIPs, which aim to enable vulnerable populations like displaced youth, women and children to earn decent livelihoods, reduce violence and mitigate poverty, have positively impacted more than 300 people through intensive vocational training sessions in diverse fields such as welding, sewing, brickmaking, carpentry, electrical works, and so forth.

Ms. Nemat Khalil, a beneficiary of the vocational training offered by UNAMID, says that the experience motivated her to become entrepreneurial. “It is solely due to the training I received in sewing that I have been able to develop the idea of opening a tailoring establishment that caters to women,” she says.

Other than vocational training projects, UNAMID, through its CLIPs programme, has also supported the construction of youth centers in the town. So far, two youth centers, one

in Ardamata, on the outskirts of El Geneina, and the other in El Shatei, located in the heart of the town, are operational. These serve as neutral platforms for Darfuri youth to discuss their concerns and problems. Moreover, a variety of activities, including literacy classes and awareness-raising workshops on important issues such as HIV/AIDS are regularly organized in these centers. Such youth centers in different parts of West Darfur, including El Geneina, have received official recognition from the Ministry of Youth, Sports and Culture.

“The youth centers in West Darfur, built with UNAMID’s support, have become a vital advocacy tool for youth-based issues,” explains Mr. Mohammed Mukhtar, Director, Youth Department, Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports, West Darfur. Mr. Mukhtar adds that the establishment of such centers is among the top priorities of his department. He

also says he believes that the youth-development oriented activities organized in these centers are instrumental in furnishing young people with the knowledge and skills necessary to adapt to the changing situation in Darfur, thereby laying the foundations for more stable community dynamics.

El Geneina has also made considerable advances in cultural and intellectual spheres. An outstanding feature of the town is the number of mosques and the intensive sessions provided by the Quran Centers. Most families send their children to these Centers where they are educated about Islam and its teachings as well as taught communications skills in formal Arabic. These Centers are accredited and encouraged by the Government of Sudan. Moreover, they extend their curriculum to all who are interested in acquiring authentic knowledge about the Holy Quran. Moreover, a daily prayer dedicated toward sustainable peace in Darfur is read at almost every mosque here.

In an attempt to spread the unique cultural and religious ethos prevalent in El Geneina and to ensure that similar messages of peace are incorporated in religious and social spheres across Darfur, the African Union-United Nations Mission in Darfur (UNAMID) has conducted workshops with Imams in all five states; the objective is to encourage them to direct their speeches so as to build popular support for the ongoing peace process.

Another noteworthy example of the town’s intellectual advancement is the ongoing construction of an electronic library and the recently opened auditorium which frequently stages drama performances targeted at raising community awareness regarding issues such as HIV/AIDS, sexual and gender-based violence, and so forth. It is hoped that such spaces will encourage local communities, especially students, in their academic pursuits. The electronic library, particularly, is targeted at tackling the lack of student resources for higher education.

UNAMID has continued its efforts to facilitate students in the pursuance of

higher education through its Quick Impact Projects (QIPs). UNAMID, through its QIPs, has provided 36 computers to the El Geneina University. “Without such projects being implemented by UNAMID, it would have been nearly impossible for us to achieve our educational goals,” avers Mr. Ahmed Mahdi, Registrar, El Geneina University. He notes that with the installation of these new computers, many more students can easily avail online resources and study aids in the University’s computer laboratory.

As part of its efforts to support education in West Darfur, UNAMID has also constructed a school in the Krindig camp for displaced girls in El Geneina and has supplied study materials to several other schools in the area.

Despite all these advances, the predominance of instability in most

areas of Darfur has a direct impact on El Geneina and its progress. The town’s strategic geographical location as well as its uniquely harmonized society renders it a prime candidate for speedy growth and economic expansion. However, like all other major cities and towns in Darfur, its future is dependent on comprehensive, sustainable peace across the region. As Mr. Gali-Koma explains, “Peace is the fulcrum for development across the world; in the absence of a negotiated and fair peace agreement in Darfur, El Geneina’s economic renaissance, so to speak, shall be left incomplete.” Peace and stability, he adds, are a shared responsibility and Darfuris need to work collectively to usher in an era of socio-economic prosperity throughout this conflict-torn land.

“Peace is the fulcrum of development across the world; in the absence of a negotiated and fair peace settlement in Darfur, El Geneina’s economic renaissance, so to speak, shall be left incomplete.”

—Haider Gali-Koma

On 12 November 2014, the Sultan Tajeldin Medical Complex, the largest hospital in West Darfur, is pictured here. El Geneina’s reputation as a strategic trading hub has been enhanced by the infrastructural improvements such as hospitals, a new theatre and the new airport which connects it directly to the federal capital of Sudan, Khartoum, as well as other major Darfuri towns. Photo by Hamid Abdulsalam, UNAMID.



Markets in Darfur

Darfuri marketplaces, such as the El Fasher market in North Darfur, are vibrant, thriving spaces and symbolize the spirit of entrepreneurship and resilience inherent in local communities across this conflict-affected region.

BY SALAH MOHAMMED & HAMID ABDULSALAM

For communities that rely almost completely on agriculture and livestock produce to generate income, market areas in Darfur are an integral aspect of daily life. The decade-long conflict in the region has resulted in mass displacements and a significant increase in population in areas near major towns across the region. Consequently, demand for necessary items and services in these towns, has escalated significantly. A strong example of this is El Fasher in North Darfur, a town with a population of some 1.2 million people, many of whom live in displaced persons' camps that have sprung up on the outskirts of the town.

The El Fasher market, located in the heart of this busy town in North Darfur, is a place of constant activity, bustling with goods and services and thriving with new business opportunities. Customers throng the stalls, buying a variety of necessary items, and often, stopping for a cup of tea and conversation at one of the many tea stands operated by local ladies.

The market is an important commercial trade center, attracting commodities from neighbouring countries such as Chad and Libya. Additionally, it serves as a platform for farmers from surrounding areas within Darfur, such as Jebel Marra, Kutum and Kabkabiya, to sell their produce.

El Fasher market opens early in the morning, with tradespeople and merchants setting up their displays of cereal, fruit, vegetables and so forth. In addition to foodstuff, the market boasts of small stores stocking clothing, shoes, furniture, cosmetic and beauty sup-

plies, electronic devices and mobile phones. Internally displaced persons (IDPs) have also carved out a niche for themselves in this busy market—some purchase food items in large quantities to sell in the nearby IDP camps, while others, primarily women, sell handcrafts. Moreover, business-savvy shopkeepers cater to the large numbers of aid workers in Darfur and have expanded their product base to include goods required by them.

On any given day, almost every stall has more customers than it can handle—women and men stocking up on food and other necessities in preparation for upcoming weekends and occasions. People shopping here often stop for a meal at the local restaurants serving roasted meat and chicken.

El Fasher also has other, smaller markets such as Mawashe and Um Dafaso; these have specific days when farmers bring in fresh produce for sale. People across Darfur, primarily herders, also trade in livestock. An example of a thriving animal market can be found in Forobaranga, West Darfur, where animals—cattle, sheep, goat and camels—are bought and sold. A smaller, but equally busy, version of livestock trading is conducted in the Abu Shouk camp for displaced persons near El Fasher town.

Darfuri marketplaces are a vibrant, credible indicator that despite the volatile security situation and the everyday struggles of people here, the spirit of entrepreneurship and economic development continues unabated across the region.



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1 A fruit-seller is pictured in his stall at the bustling El Fasher market in North Darfur. The market serves as a platform for farmers from surrounding areas, such as Jebel Marra, Kutum and Kabkabiya, to sell their produce. Photo by Hamid Abdulsalam. UNAMID.

2 Mr. Ali Hamad Khalil is pictured selling fresh vegetables to a customer in El Fasher Market. Almost every stall in this busy market has more customers than it can handle—women and men stocking up on food and other necessities in preparation for upcoming weekends and occasions. Photo by Hamid Abdulsalam, UNAMID.

3 El Fasher market opens early in the morning, with tradespeople and merchants setting up their displays of cereal, fruit, vegetables and so forth. Here, a stall owner is photographed displaying the freshness of his product. Photo by Hamid Abdulsalam. UNAMID.



4 Farm-fresh produce, such as these carefully displayed oranges, is the unique selling point across local markets in Darfur. For communities that rely almost completely on agriculture and livestock produce to generate income, market areas in Darfur are an integral aspect of daily life. Photo by Hamid Abdulsalam, UNAMID.



5 A lady is pictured selling peeled groundnuts at the El Fasher market in North Darfur. Groundnuts are one of Darfur's leading crops. The El Fasher market, located in the heart of this busy town in North Darfur, is a place of constant activity, bustling with goods and services and thriving with new business opportunities. Photo by Hamid Abdulsalam, UNAMID.



6 On 3 November 2014, a miller selects the grain to be ground into flour at the Al Maweshe market in El Fasher, North Darfur. Mawashe and Um Dafaso markets are smaller in size than the main El Fasher market but extremely busy, nonetheless. Photo by Hamid Abdulsalam, UNAMID.



7 A restaurant owner pictured while cooking at the El Fasher market in Darfur. People shopping here often stop for a meal at the local restaurants serving roasted meat and chicken. Photo by Hamid Abdulsalam, UNAMID.

Darfur's Designs: An Interview with Salwa Mukhtar Saleh

Renowned Darfuri fashion designer, Dr. Salwa Mukhtar Saleh, speaks to *Voices of Darfur* about her design sensibility, her views on the challenges faced by women and youth in Darfur as well as the role played by local intellectuals in the ongoing peace process.

BY ALA MAYYAH



Dr. Salwa Mukhtar Saleh, a famous academic and womenswear designer, is pictured among the handbags, shoes and clothes created by her in her workshop. Dr. Saleh's designs are very popular among Darfuri women on account of their aesthetic value and are reasonably priced. Photo by Hamid Abdulsalam, UNAMID.

An academic for 19 years, Dr. Salwa Mukhtar Saleh is a well-known figure in her hometown, El Fasher, North Darfur. Holding a doctoral degree in educational technologies, Dr. Saleh has been lecturing at the El Fasher University since 1995. In addition to her primary professional responsibilities, she has carved out a significant niche for herself as a popular womenswear designer. Dr. Saleh creates tasteful, high quality Sudanese thobes (dresses) as well as ac-

cessories such as handbags and shoes. Her customers, she says, are women of discerning taste; this motivates her to experiment and refine her design ethic.

In the past couple of years, Dr. Saleh has held two shows at the El Fasher Cultural Centre where she displayed more than 100 thobe designs, both contemporary and traditional. She has also participated in several exhibitions in Khartoum, jointly with other artists.

In an interview with *Voices of Darfur*,

Dr. Saleh speaks about her design sensibility, her views on the challenges faced by women and youth in Darfur as well as the role played by local intellectuals in the ongoing peace process.

Voices of Darfur: Tell us more about how you started designing thobes as well as accessories such as handbags and shoes for women. How do you get these items manufactured?

Dr. Saleh: For me, designing, whether accessories or clothes, started as a

hobby more than 20 years ago. When it comes to shoes and handbags, I first draw the item incorporating all design details and colours. Once this is done, I determine the appropriate material to be used, such as leather, suede or satin. Following this, I implement the initial drawing of the design onto the chosen fabric or material and take it to a shoemaker who does the assembling and pasting under my supervision and guidance.

In terms of clothes, I began wearing my own designs while attending social occasions, and soon relatives and friends started asking me to create similar pieces for them. I started doing so and experienced great joy in seeing other women proudly wear my designs. I have continued designing fashionable clothes mainly because it is a passion for me; I started selling my pieces only in the past few years. Currently, I have a small workshop at home where I do preliminary creative work on shoes and handbags but I still need a proper craftsman to do the final constructing for these accessories.

VoD: Do you design keeping global fashion trends in mind or do you create designs specifically targeting Darfuri tastes in clothes?

Dr. Saleh: Darfuri women typically keep abreast of global aesthetic and fashion trends in many aspects. They like to possess both locally-made and imported clothing. A Darfuri woman retains an elegant style sensibility and likes to own beautiful things despite the difficult economic situations here. In my designs, I use specific colours and patterns that represent tastefulness and simplicity—this combination, in my opinion, reflects Darfur's women.

VoD: Do you sell in other places in addition to Darfur? How do you price your designs?

Dr. Saleh: Yes, I sell in Khartoum as well. My participation in the Khartoum International Exhibition and the Made in Sudan show, which took place in June 2014, is evidence of the wide popularity of my designs. I have received much acclaim from relevant institutions as well



Dr. Salwa Mukhtar Saleh, noted Darfuri designer, displays an intricate thobe design created by her. According to Dr. Saleh, her designs combine specific colours and patterns that represent tastefulness and simplicity, which, she believes, reflects Darfur's women. Photo by Hamid Abdulsalam, UNAMID.

as individuals, which I highly appreciate. Today, my pieces have found space in most houses in Darfur.

In terms of prices, my clothes and accessories are affordable for Sudanese women in general and specifically for Darfuris. I don't pursue financial profit. Rather, I aim at fighting expensive imported clothing in the local markets. Fortunately, I believe this approach has placed me on the path I planned for when I initially started as a designer.

VoD: Do you have any competitors, especially other women designers in Darfur working in same industry?

Dr. Saleh: It is everyone's right to compete in or add to any professional field. Competition motivates people toward innovation and progress. I'm confident of what I deliver to my customers in terms of quality, creativeness and evolution.

VoD: In a previous interview, you mentioned your interest in establishing a training center for making thobes; would you consider initiating a similar center for shoes and handbags?

Dr. Saleh: I am ambitious by nature and I have been considering this project for ten years now; however, haven't been

able to see the training center to fruition on account of my professional and family commitments. I have a workshop at home and I expect it to be the foundation for this center, hopefully.

VoD: Has the difficult economic situation in Darfur affected your customers' ability to purchase your work, or do you have regular customers who can afford to buy your pieces?

Dr. Saleh: The economic situation has affected many aspects of life in Darfur, especially when it comes to the humanitarian aspect. Sales, during such periods, go up and down. However, Darfuri women retain their love for beauty and like to own nice clothing despite the current economy. I have customers of different types who understand that my pricing is very reasonable and regularly buy my thobes, handbags and shoes. I understand their circumstances and know how much they value my products.

VoD: Many women's arts in Darfur are income-generating. Do Darfuri women create such pieces because they love art or merely to fulfil a financial necessity?

Dr. Saleh: Both reasons are equally valid actually. Many Darfuri women

farm, fetch wood, among other things, to make a better living. Learning and practicing income-generating crafts follows from the same principle. Additionally, Darfur's environment is rich in aesthetic raw elements; this feeds into the creative process of the women here, when it comes to crafting graceful traditional pieces. Therefore, I believe while some women work in such crafts purely for financial purposes, others create them with an artistic and cultural vision.

VoD: Between heritage and modernism, where do Darfuri artists stand today? Does their work have a more contemporary slant or are they still mostly following traditional styles?

Dr. Saleh: The Darfuri artist is ambitious and aware of what's going on in the world through various channels of communications. These days, most artists incorporate a contemporary style within the boundaries of the overarching traditional ethos.

VoD: Do you think traditional Darfuri arts will survive in the future with Darfuri youth becoming increasingly open to new trends?

Dr. Saleh: Traditional Darfuri arts today are in dire need of maintenance and preservation. This is because of the cultural influx from across the globe. There is an intellectual alienation which we, as Darfuris, cannot hope to mitigate unless we advance these arts so as to safeguard the cultural heritage of this land. It is the responsibility of those who specialize in and care for the arts. Also, the media too can play an effective role in ensuring that traditional arts continue to thrive in the market.

VoD: As you teach young students and discuss different subjects with them, do you see Darfuri youth optimistic about the future after peace comes to Darfur?

Dr. Saleh: University students comprise a large part of Darfur's societal framework. Some of them are optimistic, while others do not seem to be overly enthusiastic about the future. However, I personally believe that optimism is the key to achieving any goal. As Darfuris, we are united in the hope that peace shall prevail across the region and we do count largely on the youth to contribute to improving the situation here.



Renowned Darfuri designer, Dr. Salwa Mukhtar Saleh, displays a shoe designed by her. Dr. Saleh, after making a name for herself as skillful thobe designer, ventured into creating accessories for women, such as shoes and handbags. Photo by Hamid Abdulsalam, UNAMID.

“I urge all Darfuri mothers to continue raising their children well and encouraging them to complete their education, boys as well as girls, for every positive change starts with the family unit.”

VoD: There are ongoing efforts, currently, to implement an internal dialogue on peace among all Darfuri groups. In your opinion, how can artists and writers contribute effectively to it?

Dr. Saleh: I think Darfuri artists and writers are ready to play an important role in this process, if asked to participate, as long as this dialogue aims at achieving fair, inclusive peace for all. In my opinion, most Darfuris realize now the importance of having peace and security as a foundation for development projects which will improve our situation. Darfur, today, needs its intellectuals more than ever, whether artists, writers, teachers or anyone else working in similar capacities. These are the people who are capable of continuing constructive dialogues on peace at the locality and state levels, as well as mediating in community disputes and suggesting impartial solutions for all parties.

VoD: Do you think women in Darfur will become stronger in the coming years or has the conflict weakened the role of women greatly?

Dr. Saleh: Darfuri women are strong by nature. Today, they exist on a

level plane with men. The conflict hasn't weakened women, even if it hasn't empowered them. In general, all of us—women, men and children, belonging to various communities—living here have been affected by the conflict. In future, it might be a useful exercise to publish studies on the influence of the conflict on Darfur's society and the transformation of the role of women in comparison to the years before the conflict.

VoD: What is the message that you would like to deliver to the people of Darfur?


Dr. Saleh: I call upon Darfur's youth to engage actively in doing good work for their families, for their homeland, Darfur, and for their country, Sudan. In addition to this, I urge all Darfuri mothers to continue raising their children well and encouraging them to complete their education, boys as well as girls, for every positive change starts with the family unit. I would also like to say to the people of Darfur that our country is large enough for all of us. Therefore, let us unite for the greater good and create a better future for us as well for upcoming generations. ■



Noted Darfuri womenswear and accessories designer, Dr. Salwa Mukhtar Saleh, is photographed working on a piece in her workshop. The enterprising designer says she hopes this workshop will be the foundation for a training center for making thobes and accessories such as shoes and handbags. Photo by Hamid Abdulsalam, UNAMID.



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