On 29 May 2014, UNAMID peacekeepers celebrated the International Day of United Nations Peacekeepers in El Fasher, North Darfur. Held under the theme “a force for peace, a force for change, and a force for the future,” the event was attended by UNAMID Joint Special Representative Mohamed Ibn Chambas, North Darfur Deputy Governor Al Fatih Abdulaziz, along with military, police and civilian personnel from UNAMID and Government of Sudan officials.

The programme in El Fasher opened with a military and police parade; the lowering of the AU and UN flags; the observance of a minute of silence; and a wreath-laying ceremony to honour those peacekeepers who had lost their lives in the line of duty. In addition to the solemn commemoration services, the event included cultural performances by UNAMID personnel and songs sung by students from the Zain Al Abideen primary school.

UNAMID’s Chief conveyed UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon’s message for the occasion, highlighting the history of UN peacekeeping since the establishment of the organization in 1948. “Looking to the future, we can be confident that as new challenges emerge, United Nations peacekeeping will evolve to meet them,” said the JSR, quoting Mr. Ban.

Addressing the gathering, Deputy Governor Abdulaziz praised UNAMID’s efforts to help bring peace to Darfur. “We commend the men and women who have sacrificed to contribute to peace,” he said. “Peace is the ultimate goal; it is only through peace that the world can enjoy a better, more secure life.”

A total of 58 peacekeepers have lost their lives due to hostile action in Darfur since the inception of the Mission in December 2007. Similar Peacekeepers Day celebrations took place in other Darfur’s states.

In reading out the Secretary-General’s message, the JSR underscored the changing nature of peacekeeping. “United Nations peacekeeping is modernising to ensure that it can tackle tomorrow’s peace and security challenges,” he said. “It is deploying new technologies such as unarmed, unmanned aerial vehicles, refining its practices to better protect civilians, and boosting the representation of women among its ranks while strengthening its partnerships with regional organizations.”
UNAMID Peacekeeper Killed, Three Injured in North Darfur

A UNAMID peacekeeper was killed and three others were injured on the morning of 24 May 2014 in Kabkabiya, North Darfur, while attending a mediation meeting between two disputing tribes.

Following altercations between Fur people from Al Salam village and Arab militia from Al Hara village, a UNAMID team attended mediation meeting in an attempt to ease the tension. The Arab militia elements, nevertheless, became hostile toward UNAMID peacekeepers and started shooting at them, at which point the peacekeepers returned fire.

As a result of the ensuing fighting, four Rwandan peacekeepers were injured and one of them died from his wounds. The other three, one of them in critical condition, are receiving treatment at the UNAMID hospital in Kabkabiya. The fighting left an unconfirmed number of casualties among the assailants.

UNAMID Joint Special Representative (JSR) Mohamed Ibn Chambas said he is deeply saddened by the outcome of the attack and the death and injuries caused. “I condemn this heinous criminal act in the strongest possible terms,” he said. “Our peacekeepers were trying to mediate the dispute in good faith and, regrettably, their efforts went unappreciated. They paid the ultimate price with courage and dedication while discharging their noble duty, trying to bring peace to Darfur.”

The JSR called on the Government of Sudan to act decisively and swiftly in bringing the perpetrators to justice. “This crime is utterly unjustifiable and amounts to a crime against humanity for which those responsible must be brought to account,” he stressed.

Mr. Chambas extended his and the Mission’s deepest condolences to the family and friends of the late peacekeeper, and to the Government and people of Rwanda.

This sad incident brings the number of peacekeepers losing their lives in hostile action in Darfur to 58 since the inception of the Mission in December 2007.

JSR Asks International Community Not to Forget Darfur

UNAMID Joint Special Representative Mohamed Ibn Chambas visited Brussels on 20-21 May 2014 to meet with European Union (EU) officials and ask them not to forget the Darfur crisis.

In a lecture delivered at Friedrich-Ebert Foundation on 20 May, the JSR explained that Darfur appears to be on a new cycle of violence. “Civilians have been direct targets of violence, leading many to draw parallels between today’s conflict dynamics and the armed conflict in 2003,” he said. “While we should approach this comparison with caution, similarities do exist.”

Mr. Chambas noted that the structural issues that drove the 2003 conflict remained unresolved and traditional resolution mechanisms have been weakened. He mentioned that economic downturn has pushed poverty and criminality up, and that competition over land, water and mineral resources is getting more violent. “A new wave of displacements and deliberate emptying of certain areas are suspected by communities to be well underway,” he said.

“If the international community fails to grasp this pattern, create much-wider awareness, put pressure on parties to the conflict to negotiate, and help in any way it can to halt the spiral into renewed violence, the impact could be widespread and more debilitating,” the JSR warned.

The Head of UNAMID highlighted that the crisis in Darfur is deepening at a time when the attention of the international community is shifting to other equally pressing conflicts worldwide. “Without prejudice to other countries needing support, it is my appeal before the international community to not let go of Darfur,” he said, requesting the international community to continue supporting a peaceful resolution of the crisis in Darfur and funding the humanitarian actors to mitigate the effects of conflict in the region.