

VOICES

of Darfur

February 2015

Performing for Peace

An Interview with
Mohamed Yusuf Andokai

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Support for Peace**

*Traditional mechanisms support
Mission aims*

**Darfuri Women Promote
Social Cohesion**

*Gender equality in peace
process gets priority*

**Ex-Combatants Embrace
Reintegration**

*Former soldiers become
agents of change*





Noted Darfuri theatre artist, Mohamed Yusuf Andokai, is pictured here in one of his costumes in preparation for a solo act. Mr. Andokai says he feels that one-man acts require more practice than a group performance. Photo by Hamid Abdulsalam, UNAMID.

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EDITOR'S NOTE

I'm pleased to introduce the February 2015 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.

In "Community Leaders Contribute to Sustainable Peace," Mr. Mohamad Mahady examines the complex and vital role played by native administrative in rebuilding trust at the community level as well as re-establishing a culture of peace in this conflict-torn region.

In "From Combatants to Civilians: Reintegration in Darfur," Ms. Sharon Lukunka describes how UNAMID continues to provide technical and logistic support to the Government of Sudan in establishing peace across Darfur through the implementation of the Darfur DDR Programme and facilitating, in conjunction with relevant stakeholders, the successful disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration of former combatants.

In "Women Advocate for Peace in Darfur," Ms. Lukunka's second feature in this issue, she describes how, as the ongoing peace process moves steadily forward, women in Darfur have started working actively to bring about peace and reconciliation in the region. Ms. Lukunka

examines how the inclusion of women in both formal and informal negotiations and peace processes expand the constituency of these mechanisms and contribute to conflict resolution, along with creating broader social buy-in to peace deals.

In "Crafts that Ease Economic Hardship," Mr. Hamid Abdulsalam presents a photo essay designed to highlight how, in the midst of the unstable economic conditions and infrastructural disrepair caused by the ongoing conflict, Darfuri women continue to create intricate handicrafts that not only represent a cultural inheritance handed down through generations but also often serve as their only means of survival.

Finally, in our cover feature, "Performing for Peace," Mr. Emadeldin Rijal presents an interview with noted theatre artist Mohamed Yusuf Andokai where he speaks about his passion for solo acts, his views on theatre in Darfur and how performance art can play a pivotal role in ushering in positive social change.

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



Noted Darfuri theatre artist, Mohamed Yusuf Andokai, from *El Geneina* is pictured in one of his costumes. Photo by Hamid Abdulsalam, UNAMID.



A newly displaced child is pictured here after the recent clashes in North Darfur. Photo by Hamid Abdulsalam, UNAMID.



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Darfur Internal Dialogue and Consultation Process Launched in El Fasher, North Darfur



On 25 January 2015, UNAMID facilitated the launch of the Darfur Internal Dialogue and Consultation (DIDC) process. The event, conducted under the theme, “Darfur: Let’s Talk Peace Now,” was attended by UNAMID officials, Government of Sudan representatives, the DRA and civil society organizations. Photo by Mohamad Almahady, UNAMID.

On 25 January 2015, UNAMID facilitated the launch of the Darfur Internal Dialogue and Consultation (DIDC) process at El Fasher University in North Darfur.

The event brought together Government of Sudan (GoS) and Darfur Regional Authority (DRA) officials, members of the DIDC Implementation Committee, representatives of Darfur civil society and internally displaced people and UNAMID officials.

The speakers at the launch underscored the significance of the DIDC as a milestone in the implementation of the Doha Document for Peace in Darfur (DDPD) in its endeavor to bring peace and stability to the region.

The Deputy Joint Special Representative (DJSR) of UNAMID, Abdul Kamara, reiterated the importance of the DIDC and assured UNAMID’s continued commitment to support it. “It will provide an opportunity to consolidate peace, promote

confidence building and encourage reconciliation as well as unity amongst the people of Darfur and Sudan in general,” Mr. Kamara remarked.

“The aspirations of young Darfuris for prosperity and security cannot be fully realized in this situation of conflict, insecurity and continued violence,” said the DJSR, calling on Darfuris to fully embrace this process.

DRA Chairman, Eltigani Seisi, called on all Darfuri stakeholders to join the DDPD for the sake of peace, stability and development across the region and commended the significant contribution of the State of Qatar in the peace process. Dr. Seisi called on IDPs and refugees to participate in the DIDC, so that their concerns and aspirations are taken into account.

The Head of the Darfur Peace Follow-up Office, Dr. Amin Hassan Omer, drew attention to key issues in Darfur related to trust-building,

land ownership, provision of justice, return of the internally displaced people and refugees, as well as development projects. He expressed hope that the DIDC process will present a genuine opportunity for the people of Darfur to come together and address their differences.

“Our basic concern in Sudan is the issue of trust building. I am confident the people of Darfur will be successful in building trust and achieving social harmony. Therefore, the government is committed to creating a suitable environment for reconciliation,” said Dr. Omer.

“There is no choice for the people of Darfur to get out of their crisis other than dialogue,” said Siddiq Abdalla (Wada’a), the Chairman of the DIDC Implementation Committee, pointing out that dialogue is the best way to bring an end to fighting and destruction.

This event heralds the start of the formal DIDC, a

process that will take place in 64 localities across the five Darfur states, in addition to Khartoum. The dialogue will involve all sectors of Darfuri society, including IDPs, refugees, civil society and Darfuris in the diaspora.

Following these meetings, JSR Chambas, on 12 September, briefed the African Union Peace and Security Council on Darfur in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, where he outlined recent mediation efforts undertaken by him in collaboration with AUHIP, the UN Special Envoy to Sudan and South Sudan (SESSS), the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and the Arab League. He focused on ways of integrating the Darfur peace process into the broader opportunity presented by the National Dialogue Initiative announced by President Al-Bashir earlier this year. He reiterated the imperative for finding a political solution to the unfolding humanitarian crisis in Darfur while addressing existing security challenges.

He also recommended to the Council the integration of mediation efforts in Darfur, in particular, and Sudan, in general, into one robust mechanism, under the leadership of President Thabo Mbeki, the Chairperson of the AUHIP, in order to harness the respective strengths of the AUHIP, UNAMID, SESSS, IGAD, Qatar and the Arab League into a synchronized, coherent and programmatic mediation structure. ■

UNAMID Concerned over Impact of Fighting on Civilian Population in Darfur

Following clashes between armed opposition groups and the Sudanese Armed Forces in the East Jebel Marra area and north of Kutum over the past few weeks, the African Union-United Nations Mission in Darfur (UNAMID) is concerned about the impact of the ongoing conflict on civilians.

Newly displaced people arrived in several localities of North Darfur, mainly in Um Baru, Tawila and Sartoni as well as Nertiti in Central Darfur. UNAMID is working in coordination with the UN Country Team (UNCT) and other humanitarian actors to provide protection and assist in

the distribution of urgent aid to the affected populations.

A significant number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) have sought refuge in a safe zone adjacent to the Mission's Um Baru Team Site in North Darfur. They reportedly fled the surrounding villages of Orchi, Abu Leha and Doldol. UNAMID is providing protection as well as temporary shelter, water and some medical assistance to the IDPs, while humanitarian actors have arrived on the ground and started distributing and providing additional assistance.

In Tawila, where more than 5,700 newly displaced

individuals have settled in Argo, Dali and Rwanda IDP camps, UNAMID peacekeepers intensified their patrols around the camp and are coordinating with humanitarian agencies which are providing assistance to those in need. The Mission also assisted some displaced people to retrieve their property from Konjara village which they have since vacated.

At midnight on 20 January, 150 civilians, mostly women and children from Tui and Korambi villages, arrived at Sartoni, North Darfur, and sought refuge in an area some 500 meters

from the Mission's Team Site fearing Government of Sudan forces' alleged plan to attack their villages. Peacekeepers provided the newly displaced people with tents and water and the Mission is liaising with the UNCT for appropriate humanitarian support. The majority of the newly displaced returned to their villages on 21 January. The Mission continues to monitor the situation.

The Mission has not been able to assess the actual impact of the fighting on the affected villages where the newly displaced were coming from due to access restrictions. ■

UNAMID Acting Joint Special Representative Visits West Darfur

UNAMID Acting Joint Special Representative (AJSR), Mr. Abiodun Bashua, visited El Geneina, West Darfur, on 14-15 January to assess the security situation, the cooperation between the African Union-United Nations Mission in Darfur (UNAMID) and local authorities and the humanitarian situation, particularly the plight of internally displaced people (IDPs).

During his two-day visit, Mr. Bashua met with the West Darfur Governor (Wali), Mr. Haider Galikoma Ateem, who briefed him on the security situation, humanitarian issues and the government's role in the provision of basic services to IDPs and other returnees as well as facilitation

of their resettlement through allocation of residential plots. Additionally, they discussed aspects of cooperation between the State government and UNAMID regarding progress in implementing the Final Security Arrangements for the Liberation and Justice Movement (LJM) forces along with a number of other issues.

Mr. Bashua reiterated the Mission's commitment and support for the success of the security arrangements programme for LJM forces as an important step to bring about lasting peace across the Darfur region. The AJSR praised the level of cooperation and coordination between UNAMID and the West Darfur State government working togeth-

er to promote peace efforts in the region. He also called upon the Wali to initiate the formation of a committee composed of the State government, UNAMID, UN agencies and representatives from the IDP community to work toward the success of the voluntary returns programmes.

Furthermore, the AJSR stressed that UNAMID will continue to provide support to the people of West Darfur through the implementation of additional community development projects, especially those aimed at providing potable water services to local communities, including IDP camps.

Mr. Bashua also had an extended meeting with IDPs

in the Ardamata camp where he was briefed on the camp's situation and the problems faced by the inhabitants, such as in-adequate supply of water, as well as substantial shortages of education and health services. They expressed serious apprehension about their security and urged UNAMID to bolster its police and military presence in order to be more effective in protecting them.

On his part, the AJSR pledged to work closely with relevant stakeholders and UN agencies to find a resolution to these issues, adding that protecting innocent civilians, in collaboration with the Government of Sudan, is part of UNAMID's core mandate. ■

Implementation Follow-Up Commission of the Doha Document Discusses Progress and Challenges

The ninth meeting of the Implementation Follow-up Commission (IFC) of the Doha Document for Peace in Darfur (DDPD) was held on 12 January 2015 in Nyala, South Darfur. The Commission discussed the progress made and the challenges faced in the implementation of the DDPD since its last meeting which was held on 28 April 2014.

The meeting was chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister of the State of Qatar, H.E. Ahmed bin Abdullah Al Mahmoud. The Government of Sudan was represented by Minister of State Dr. Amin Hassan Omer, while the Wali (Governor) of West Darfur, Mr. Haider Galikoma, and Mr. Altoum Suliman, represented the Liberation and Justice Movement (LJM) and Justice and Equality Movement-Sudan, respectively. Also present were the representatives of the African Union, the European Union, the League of Arab States, Canada, Chad, China, Egypt, France, Japan, Russian Federation, the United Kingdom and the United

States of America. Mr. Abiodun Bashua, the Acting AU-UN Joint Special Representative (AJSR) and Joint Chief Mediator hosted the event at UNAMID's headquarters in Nyala, Sector South.

Presenting the IFC Secretariat's report to the meeting, Acting JSR Bashua reiterated UNAMID's commitment and determination to continue to support and cooperate with DDPD parties and IFC members in implementing mandated tasks, as stipulated in the DDPD. He sought for the collaboration of all IFC members: "I look forward to your support so that we can collectively continue, more steadfastly, the tasks of promoting lasting peace, stability and development in Darfur," Mr. Bashua said.

The AJSR underlined UNAMID's efforts in support of expediting the implementation of the Final Security Arrangements provisions of the DDPD for ex-combatants of JEM-Sudan and LJM. While commending the DDPD parties for their efforts in this regard, the AJSR said, "I urge the parties to continue and finalize all arrange-



On 12 January 2015, the ninth meeting of the Implementation Follow-up Commission (IFC), established by the Doha Document for Peace in Darfur (DDPD), took place in Nyala, South Darfur. Photo by Hamid Abdulsalam, UNAMID.

ments and outstanding issues in order to bring the process to foreclosure as soon as possible."

Addressing the meeting, Deputy Prime Minister Al Mahmoud renewed his country's pledge to continue its steadfast support for the DDPD and strongly urged other international stakeholders and IFC members to rededicate themselves and demonstrate their continuing support through fulfilling their commitments and pledges in order to facilitate timely and enhanced

implementation of the DDPD with a view to enhancing peace and stability in the region.

Furthermore, he stressed that "the aspired for peace in Darfur will not be achieved through agreements and protocols alone; rather by those who have the best interests of their country and their people at heart. Therefore, the implementation and follow-up phase should be an all-inclusive exercise encompassing all the communities and groups in Darfur." ■

UNAMID Reaches Out to Tina Community



On 10 December 2014, members of Massalit tribe perform a traditional dance during an event organized by the UNAMID in Tina, North Darfur, to disseminate the culture of peace. Photo by Hamid Abdulsalam, UNAMID.

On 10 December 2014, some 700 people attended a cultural event organized by the African Union- United Nations Mission in Darfur (UNAMID) in Tina, North Darfur, to disseminate the culture of peace.

The event, held under the theme "Darfur: Talk Peace Now," brought together school students, internally displaced persons and many Darfuri refugees living in Chad.

Due to the close proximity to the border with Chad, the movement of people between

the Sudanese Tina locality and Chadian locality with the same name is frequent. The Darfuri students who live in Chad take an hour-walk back and forth to attend school in their hometown, Tina Sudan. In addition to this, other people, especially traders, move on a daily-basis between the two border areas. Despite the majority of the Darfuri population of Tina have remained in the Chadian Tina since 2003, few families have permanently returned.

The ceremony, which was marked by folk dances, the-

atre and cultural shows, presented an opportunity for the audience to recall the spirit of peaceful coexistence prevalent in the past. “I have really yearned for the past where we were all together,” stated Hawa Hamid, a 55-year woman. While Ms. Hamid is among those who fled to Chad ten years ago due to fighting in Tina, she hopes that peace will prevail in Darfur.

Meanwhile, speakers to the event highlighted the pivotal role of culture in bringing people together and enhanc-

ing the fabric of the society. “It is good to come together,” said Jafar Bushara, the Commissioner of Tina Locality, commending the role of culture in enhancing peace and ensuring the coherence of the society. “Such event ushers in peace and stability and the return of refugees and the internally displaced people,” he said. Mr. Bushara called on the gathering to care about culture for the sake of a unified and peaceful society.

Anwar Abdalla, a representative of youth in Tina,

stated that such cultural event is effective in enhancing the spirit of solidarity and togetherness among people. “The event will allow us to maintain values such as solidarity through coming together,” he added, calling for further similar events to make more impact in this community.

On behalf of UNAMID, Albert Malou, Commander of Tina Team Site, reaffirmed the need for raising peace issue. “We are here today to talk about peace and I call on you to maintain peace,” said the Commander.

Mr. Malou briefed the gathering on the UNAMID mandate priorities which include protection of civilians, providing support for the tribal reconciliations and facilitating the delivery of humanitarian assistance.

UNAMID, through its Community Outreach Unit, has regularly been organizing events in different communities across Darfur in an attempt to consolidate peace and foster peaceful coexistence among the local communities. ■

UNAMID Commemorates Human Rights Day in Darfur



On 10 December 2014, a local musical group performs during the commemoration of International Human Rights Day in El Geneina, West Darfur. Photo by Muntasir Sharafadin, UNAMID.

Cultural performances, traditional dances and drama presentations were among the activities conducted the Ajaweed group and University students during the commemoration of Human Rights Days. Held on 10 December 2014 under the theme Human Rights 365, the event was organized by UNAMID in collaboration with the University of Zalingei in El Geneina, West Darfur.

The ceremony, which took place at the campus of the University, was attended by senior local authorities, UNAMID staff, representatives from UN entities and international non-governmental organizations as well as officials from the University.

UNAMID’s Acting Head of Office, in El Geneina, West Darfur, Mr. Abdoul Sow, read the United Nations Secretary General’s message on the occasion.

In his message, Secretary-General said the United Nations protects human rights because that is our proud mission – and because when people enjoy their rights, economies flourish and countries are at peace. Violations of human rights are more than personal tragedies. They are alarm bells that may warn of a much bigger crisis.

“We declare that human rights are for all of us, all the

time: whoever we are and wherever we are from; no matter our class, our opinions, our sexual orientation. This is a matter of individual justice, social stability and global progress,” the message said.

In her remarks, the Minister of Social Affairs, Youth and Sports, Ms. Suda Salih Abdullah, thanked the Mission for its efforts and the role in the region and reaffirmed and reiterated the Government’s commitment to work together with UNAMID and all other partners to promote human rights principles as well as international resolutions.

The Vice Chancellor of University, Dr. Eltayib Ali Ahmed, expressed commitment to work closely with UNAMID in order to maintain and promote human rights principles, calling upon all people to renounce violence and respect human rights.

Similar events were held in Zalingei and Mukjar in Central Darfur and Um Baru in North Darfur to mark the occasion. ■

UNAMID Launches “No Child Soldiers - Protect Darfur” Campaign in El Fasher

As part of its Darfur-wide campaign “No Child soldiers-Protect Darfur,” on 9 December 2014, UNAMID together with the Ministry of Social Affairs, Sudan DDR Commission and UNICEF, visited a centre for former child soldiers near El Fasher town in North Darfur.

During the occasion, the Mission distributed vests with messages that promote the protection of children and against the use of child soldiers.

The North Darfur Director for Social Welfare, Umda Mohammed Abakar, pointed

out that El Nasri centre is one of five centres in North Darfur that accommodates former child soldiers while reintegrating them into the community. Since 2009, more than 200 former child soldiers have received support during the reintegration process. “Most of these children have now been enrolled in secondary schools and University as well as received vocational training,” he added.

Other speakers including the North Darfur Minister of Social Affairs, Fatima Ibrahim Ahmed, and the Director of the Centre, Abdullah Muktar

Habis, expressed appreciation to UNAMID and UNICEF for its efforts aimed at the protection of children. They also requested for more support in the provision of additional classrooms.

On her part, the Minister of Social Affairs also disclosed that the Ministry will implement a plan on the protection of children in the region for the period 2015 in line with the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

On behalf of the former child soldiers, Mohammad Hassab El Kareem Zarq explained that he received

vocational training through the centre, and he thanked UNAMID, UNICEF and the Sudan Disarmament Demobilization and Reintegration Commission (SDDRC) for their support.

“Concerted efforts to eradicate child soldiering in Darfur have gone a long way thanks to the overwhelming support received from communities, authorities and genuine cooperation by all parties to the conflict. The protection of children is at the heart of peace in every society,” said Boubacar Dieng, UNAMID Head of Child Protection. ■

Darfur Youth Enroll in UNAMID-Funded Training Programme

On 10 December 2014, a three-month vocational training for 120 youth including women and persons with disabilities, funded by UNAMID’s Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) Section, started in El Fasher, North Darfur. The programme being held at El Fasher Technical School is part of the Mission’s Community-based Labour-Intensive Projects (CLIPs) designed to address the needs of youth and other vulnerable groups at risk of being mobilized into armed movements and criminal groups due to lack of education, employment and basic life skills.

The opening session was attended by representatives from the Ministry of Education, the school headmaster, youth representatives and UNAMID officials. Addressing the opening, UNAMID’s DDR representative Joseph Ekwale stressed on the importance of such a pro-



On 10 December 2014, students are pictured here during the opening ceremony of a three-month vocational training programme funded by UNAMID’s Community-based, Labour-intensive Projects (CLIPs) programme. The training included 120 youth, including women and persons with disabilities. Photo by Mohamed Mahady, UNAMID.

gramme for the youth in particular. He urged them to put in all their efforts in the training adding that when they complete the programme, they will be part of a productive society.

“There is no future development without the youth and there can be no development without peace,” he said.

In his remarks, the Head of the School, Adam Khalifa, explained that the objective of the programme is to enable the youth to join the labour market, build capacity and contribute to poverty reduction in the society. Mr. Khalifa thanked UNAMID DDR Section for their efforts to support the youth in Darfur.

On behalf of the youth, Saleh El Sheikh Agabaldour, emphasized the importance of skills development among youth who represent about 48 per cent of the population. He called for more collaborative efforts to empower them in the state to be able to contribute to the community. ■

Conflict Resolution

Community Leaders Contribute to Sustainable Peace

Native administration leaders are playing a complex and vital role, helping to rebuild trust at the community level and re-establish a culture of peace in the conflict-torn region of Darfur.

MOHAMAD ALMAHADY



On 20 November 2014, UNAMID's Acting Joint Special Representative, Abiodun Bashua, is pictured here inaugurating the Native Administration building constructed through the Mission's Quick Impact Projects (QIPs) programme in El Daein, East Darfur. Across Darfur, native administration plays a significant role in strategic issues such as tribal disputes, reconciliation and preserving security and stability. Photo by Abdurashed Yakubu, UNAMID.

Across Darfur, native administration plays a significant role in strategic issues such as tribal disputes, reconciliation and preserving security and stability. This aspect has become heightened on account of the ongoing conflict in the region.

Native administration functions as a system of checks and balances, an entity comprised of a specific group of people living in a particular geographical area, established to support

governance at local, state and federal levels based on the rule of law. At the heart of the efficacy of this system is the respect and honor given to community leaders as well as a centuries-old hierarchical system of leadership.

At the top of the structure is the Chief, traditionally called Nazir, Shartai, Magdoom, Malik or Sultan, depending on his tribe or ethnic origins. The Chief oversees numerous Umdas; these are heads of sub-sec-

tions within a tribe and are empowered to resolve disputes at individual and group levels. These Umdas, in turn, supervise a number of Sheikhs or Firshas who deal with day-to-day issues. The appointment of leaders at any level is usually based on succession, or, in some special cases, on a reputation for patriotism.

Despite the lack of any formal structure or a delineated administrative methodology, the native administration

system is considered by many as one of most effective management platforms among local communities across Sudan and Darfur, in particular. “The heads of tribes can make a significant difference when it comes to settling disputes and promoting harmony among different communities living in a particular geographical location as every area has unique traditions and customs and, at times, requires special problem solving and tension mitigation skills,” says El-toum Dabaka, the Nazir of the Bani Halba tribe.

However, Mr. Dabaka says he believes that the system, as it stands, requires greater support from the government in order to better enable it to perform its vital role in rebuilding the social fabric in Darfur. Umda Abdalla Khatir, a leader who supervises 13 Sheikhs at the Abu Shouk camp for internally displaced persons (IDPs), El Fasher, North Darfur, agrees with this viewpoint. “In earlier times, community leaders had greater control over the security and stability of our tribes as compared to now. With greater collaboration with the government, I believe, we can contribute immensely to achieving peace and development across Darfur,” added Umda Khatir.

In recognition of the vital responsibilities that community leaders can fulfill with regard to peace-building and reconciliation in this troubled region, the Government of Sudan has worked to enhance the involvement of community leaders in governance at the local, state and federal levels. Many leaders have been appointed to official governmental positions; community leaders have been selected as governors (Walis), federal and state ministers, consultants, commissioners and members of parliament.



On 15 August 2013, a community leader attends a meeting with UNAMID auditors in Kuma Gradayat, North Darfur. The Mission, through its Civil Affairs Section, works to provide logistical, technical and advisory support to local-level, community reconciliation initiatives in Darfur, in collaboration with a wide range of international and national stakeholders. Photo by Sojoud Elgarrai, UNAMID.

“The heads of tribes can make a significant difference when it comes to settling disputes and promoting harmony among different communities living in a particular geographical location as every area has unique traditions and customs and, at times, requires special problem solving and tension mitigation skills.”

—Eltoum Dabaka



On 21 August 2013, UNAMID provided logistical support by transporting representatives of the Reizeigat and Ma'alia tribes to Al Tawisha, North Darfur, to participate in the signing of an agreement to cease hostilities in East Darfur. Tensions between the Reizeigat and Ma'alia were reportedly triggered by unresolved disputes concerning access to land resources. As a result, the security situation deteriorated in and around El Daein and Adila, East Darfur. Photo by Hamid Abdulsalam, UNAMID.

“Darfuri native administration leads a community-inspired approach, based on traditional reconciliation mechanisms that bring communities to promote dialogue, build confidence and mediate negotiation to resolve communal conflicts.”

–Guang Cong

On its part, the African Union-United Nations Mission in Darfur (UNAMID) has allocated a primary role to community leaders across Darfur to achieve its core mandated aim of supporting, in conjunction with the United Nations Country Team, the mediation of community conflict and addressing its root causes. “Darfuri native administration leads a community-inspired approach, based on traditional reconciliation mechanisms that bring communities together to promote dialogue, build confidence and mediate negotiation to resolve communal conflicts,” says Guang Cong, Chief, Civil Affairs Section, UNAMID. “Due to the special position of native administrators in

the society, they are important interlocutors for Civil Affairs, whose role is crucial in the Mission’s engagement at the local level,” he adds.

Capacity building for conflict resolution and support to local-level reconciliation and conflict resolution mechanisms, both at the local and state levels, is essential to achieve the Mission’s overall goal of promoting sustainable peace and development in Darfur. UNAMID Civil Affairs, therefore, works to provide logistical, technical and advisory support to local-level, community reconciliation initiatives across Darfur, in collaboration with a wide range of international and national stakeholders that include the Government of Sudan,

the Darfur Regional Authority, youth associations, women’s groups, trade unions, nomads, academics, civil administration, native administration, internally displaced persons (IDPs), armed movements, international and local nongovernmental organizations, United Nations agencies as well as the traditional reconciliation mechanisms of Judiya, Ajaweed and other community-level ‘Peace Committees’ in Darfur.

Additionally, UNAMID Civil Affairs has facilitated and provided logistical support to numerous reconciliation conferences aimed at promoting peaceful coexistence between different tribes across Darfur. Native administration leaders have been a pivotal force in these meetings.

A noteworthy example of this is the two-day reconciliation meeting attended by more than 250 representatives of the Beni Hussein and Abbala tribes in Kabkabiya, North Darfur, which took place on 5 June 2014 following an escalation of conflict which resulted in the blockading of roads and preventing supplies, including food, medicine and fuel, from entering the El Sereif locality of North Darfur.

The meeting, initiated by a reconciliation committee consisting of tribal representatives, native administration leaders, members of the security management committee, officials from the Government of Sudan and Sheikh Musa Hilal, was set up to address outstanding issues between them and diffuse tensions in the area.

The King and Shartai of the Fur, the Nazir, Sheikhs and Umdas of the Reizeigat, the Nazir of the Beni Hussein, the Amir of the Tama, other significant tribal leaders from Kabkabiya, Saraf Umra and El Sereif as well as government military and police personnel participated in the conference, which concluded with the resolution of pending issues between the two tribes and an agreement to re-

open the roads leading to El Sereif.

In a similar instance, on 3 April 2013, the Salamat and the Misseriya tribes in Central Darfur entered into conflict as a result of an alleged theft of a motorbike and a related death. This conflict rapidly evolved, creating a dire humanitarian situation that resulted in large numbers of displaced civilians. A committee consisting of native administration leaders, community representatives and members of East Darfur's legislative council assisted in containing the situation by initiating reconciliation meetings. Despite an interim cessation-of-hostilities agreement signed on 7 April 2013, more clashes took place between the two tribes. UNAMID's Civil Affairs personnel mobilized a mediation conference in Zalingei, Central Darfur, in early June; that conference led to a formal peace agreement signed on 3 July.

Such tribal conflicts are a major deterrent to the overall peace process. Tribal clashes, unaddressed, have the potential to engulf Darfur in violence. Most tribes involved in such conflicts are interconnected across Darfur, creating a situation in which a tribal dispute in one location can quickly escalate into a massive conflict across the region. Harnessing the unique position of community leaders, in addition to working with local and regional authorities, ensures the involvement of the affected communities themselves, and enables Civil Affairs to put in place pre-emptive approaches to solving such disputes.

For example, Civil Affairs has helped establish more than 44 Peaceful Coexistence Committees that consist of leaders from native administration, tribal groups, religious organizations and camps for displaced people. The section has held many meetings and conducted several workshops, all designed to cultivate effective mediation skills and foster an attitude con-



On 18 December 2014, UNAMID organized a cultural festival to promote the peace process in Mellit, North Darfur. The event was attended by all tribes living the area and community leaders, some of whom are pictured here, committed themselves to maintaining peaceful coexistence. Photo by Mohamad Almahady, UNAMID.

“Due to the special position of native administrators in the society, they are important interlocutors for Civil Affairs, whose role is crucial in the Mission’s engagement at the local level.”

–Guang Cong

ducive to the prevention and management of conflict through dialogue.

Moreover, initiatives such as Darfur Darfur Dialogue and Consultation (DDDC) and the Darfur Internal Dialogue and Consultation (DIDC) have brought together a range of native administration leaders from across Darfur to discuss issues related to the conflict and pave the way for lasting peace in this part of Sudan.

Native administration in Darfur, therefore, is a crucial tool augmenting UNAMID’s work at the political and local levels through mediation, conflict resolution and reconciliation initiatives, along with the Mission’s work on gender issues, and its work to promote

human rights, rule of law, child protection and good governance. All these are measures designed to create a stable environment that provides protection to civilians.

Revitalizing Darfur’s traditional conflict-resolution mechanisms, opening up opportunities for communities to either agree or disagree on issues, and helping them discuss problems, such as access to water points for both nomads and farmers, without resorting to violence, through the active involvement of native administration, is invaluable in helping Darfuris build on the culture of peace, tolerance and understanding, thereby creating an atmosphere of mutual respect and harmony. ■



From Combatants to Civilians: Reintegration in Darfur

UNAMID continues to provide technical and logistic support to the Government of Sudan in establishing peace across Darfur through the implementation of the Darfur DDR Programme and facilitating, in conjunction with relevant stakeholders, the successful disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration of former combatants.

BY SHARON LUKUNKA



On 25 August 2014, former combatants from the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM)-Sudan/Dabajo faction, are pictured in El Fasher, North Darfur, before being absorbed into the Government of Sudan military. Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) activities typically, are crucial components of both the initial stabilization of war-torn societies as well as their long-term development. Photo by Hamid Abdulsalam, UNAMID.

“The main objective of the DDR process is to contribute to security and stability in post-conflict environments so that recovery and development can begin.”

—Zurab Elzarov

As part of efforts to mitigate the impact of the decade-long conflict in Darfur, the reintegration of ex-combatants into society has acquired immense importance. Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) activities typically, are crucial components of both the initial stabilization of war-torn societies as well as their long-term development.

The objective of the DDR process is to contribute to security and constancy in post-conflict environments to facilitate advancement toward recovery and development. DDR helps create an enabling environment for political and peace processes by dealing with security problem that arises when ex-combatants are trying to adjust to normal life, during the vital transition

period from conflict to peace and development. DDR is integrated into the entire peace process from peace negotiations through peacekeeping and follow-on peacebuilding activities.

In Darfur particularly, the signing of the Doha Document for Peace (DDPD) in 2011 and subsequent agreements have contributed greatly to the DDR process. Chapter VI,



On 25 August 2014, former combatants from the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM)-Sudan/Dabajo faction earmarked for integration into the Government of Sudan military are pictured in El Fasher, North Darfur. Photo by Hamid Abdulsalam, UNAMID.

paragraph 399, of the DDPD highlights that all armed and militia groups shall be disarmed and disbanded as a prerequisite for the implementation of comprehensive arms control measures, to ensure security throughout Darfur. The Government of Sudan (GoS) shall be responsible for the disarmament of armed groups

An important step in this direction was the formation of the Sudan Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration Commission (SDDRC), following the establishment of the National DDR Coordination Council in 2006, which is mandated to oversee the DDR process at the highest level. The SDDRC is tasked with implementing the DDR process in North Sudan at the state and local levels and, in recent times, leads the design and implementation of DDR in Sudan.

“I joined the movement along with other young men from my region because I wanted to defend my identity, my family and my community.”

— Mohammed Abubaker

On its part, the African Union-United Nations Mission in Darfur (UNAMID), through its Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) Section, provides technical and logistic support to the Government of Sudan in the implementation of the Darfur DDR Programme. This Programme is designed based on the Final Security Arrangements’ provisions of the Darfur Peace Agreement (DPA) signed in May 2006 and the (DDPD) adopted in July 2011 by the Government of Sudan and the Liberation and Justice Movement (LJM).

“DDR activities are crucial components of both the initial stabilization of war-torn societies as well as their long-term development. The main objective of the DDR process is to contribute to security and stability in post-conflict environments so that recovery and development can begin,” says Mr. Zurab Elzarov, Senior DDR Officer, UNAMID. To achieve this end, the Mission works in coordination with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF). With UNDP specifically,



On 3 September 2014, UNAMID's Force Commander, Lt. General Paul Mella, attending the final security arrangements for the Justice and Equality Movement-Sudan (JEM-Sudan) which started with assessment and registration of heavy equipment and weapons in El Fasher, North Darfur. Photo by Hamid Abdulsalam, UNAMID.

“Failure to address the special requirements of ex-combatants may have long-term consequences for stability and threaten what can sometimes be a fragile peace.”

—Zurab Elzarov

UNAMID closely collaborates in the Community Security and Arms Control (CSAC) interventions, rendering technical advice and logistical support. Other areas of cooperation between the Mission and UNDP include Reintegration Opportunity Mapping and Quick Impact Projects (QIPs).

One of the first DDR processes undertaken by the SDDRC, supported by UNAMID, UNDP, UNICEF as well as the World Food Programme (WFP) and the World Health Organization (WHO), was for the Sudan Liberation Army-Mother Wing and began in

2009. According to Mr. Yusef Osman Yusef, Officer in-Charge, SDDRC, more than 50 ex-combatants from SLA-Mother Wing were demobilised in the first batch while some 100 were demobilised in the second phase; the last group of 30 recently completed the demobilisation process in El Fasher, North Darfur, in November 2014.

Mohammed Abubaker was among the ex-combatants from SLA-Mother Wing who were demobilised and reintegrated into the community in November 2009. Mr. Abubaker, now a businessman, was originally from

Manawashe, South Darfur. Speaking to Voices of Darfur, the former combatant says it was his personal belief that made him join the armed movement in 2004. “I joined the movement along with other young men from my region because I wanted to defend my identity, my family and my community.”

For Mr. Abubaker and others like him, leaving their military affiliations and reentering civilian life was not an easy decision. During his reintegration process, Mr. Abubaker received a financial package of some 1,500 Sudanese Pounds (\$175) which he used to start his own business in El Fasher, North Darfur, selling goods in a shop. Additionally, he received support from friends engaged in similar activities. Leading a civilian life also gave Mr. Abubaker the opportunity to complete his education at the School of Development, El Fasher University, where he received a post graduate diploma in Economics.



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According to Mr. Abubaker, his life now has more stability as compared to his days as a combatant as he has developed strong community ties. His business is also proving to be a success; additionally, he uses his free time to support and encourage young boys in his neighborhood to complete their education and contribute to the development of their communities.

In November 2014, the SDDRC organized the third demobilisation process for former combatants belonging to the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM)-Sudan, led by Brigadier Bakheit Debajo. The movement signed a peace agreement with the Government of Sudan in April 2013. 1,350 JEM-Sudan combatants took part in the first phase of the exercise which is in line with the security ar-

rangements of the DDPD. Following medical and physical screening, more than 800 combatants were integrated into the Sudan Armed Forces and some 500 others underwent the demobilisation exercise.

Suleiman Hamis, 22, is one of the former combatants from JEM-Sudan who participated in the third demobilisation exercise in El Fasher, North Darfur. Originally from north Jebel Marra, he revealed to *Voices of Darfur* that he joined the movement in 2006. Having experienced the difficulties associated with being an active combatant, Mr. Hamis said he was happy to return to civilian life. “I wanted to go back to being a regular citizen, establish a shop or any other small business in the market and help support my family,” he added.

Similarly, Abubaker Adam, 25, originally from Malha, North Darfur, became a member of JEM-Sudan in 2010; his aim, at that moment, he says, was to fight for development in his neighborhood. He says his overall ambition remains the same—to contribute to the development of Darfur. Therefore, he reveals, after his reintegration, he plans to complete his secondary school education and, later, study to become a doctor.

According to Mr. Elzarov, DDR of former combatants is a complex process, with political, military, security, humanitarian and socioeconomic dimensions. When conflict comes to an end, those who directly took part in fighting may have special livelihood, economic and psychosocial needs, resulting from years of being engaged in



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On 25 August 2014, former combatants from the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM)-Sudan/Dabajo faction were initiated into the Government of Sudan military in El Fasher, North Darfur. As part of efforts to mitigate the impact of the decade-long conflict in Darfur, the reintegration of ex-combatants into society has acquired immense importance. Photo by Hamid Abdulsalam, UNAMID.

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On 3 September 2014, Mr. Aderemi Adekoya, Chief, UNAMID DDR, is pictured here during the final security arrangements for the Justice and Equality Movement-Sudan (JEM-Sudan), which started with assessment and registration of heavy equipment and weapons in El Fasher, North Darfur. Photo by Hamid Abdulsalam, UNAMID.

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On 3 September 2014, the final security arrangements for the Justice and Equality Movement-Sudan (JEM-Sudan) started with the assessment and registration of heavy equipment and weapons in El Fasher, North Darfur. In Darfur particularly, the signing of the Doha Document for Peace (DDPD) in 2011 and subsequent agreements have contributed greatly to the DDR process. Photo by Hamid Abdulsalam, UNAMID.

armed violence. “Failure to address the special requirements of ex-combatants may have long-term consequences for stability and threaten what can sometimes be a fragile peace,” he adds.

On its part, the UN supports DDR processes in several peacekeeping missions, including the Democratic Republic of Congo, Côte d’Ivoire, Haiti, Somalia and Darfur. The ongoing conflict has had a tremendous negative impact on the social fabric of Darfur. In the absence of a comprehensive peace agreement in place, DDR efforts in Darfur focus on community-oriented programmes designed to set the stage for formal DDR activities, fostering trust at local levels and supporting programmes to move the peace process steadily forward.

UNAMID’s DDR section has been

working through the framework of what has come to be known as second-generation DDR, which offers different strategy and policy options that rely on unique approaches considered more effective for specific contexts. “Rather than focusing on formal DDR activities, second-generation DDR takes a more organic approach in focusing on peace and security at the community level, and ensuring the involvement of these communities in the peace process,” says Aderemi Adekoya, Chief, DDR Section, UNAMID.

This second-generation approach to support peace in Darfur at the community level, UNAMID’s DDR section has been implementing a violence-reduction strategy that has taken several forms in practice, most notably in CLIPs—community-based, labour-

intensive projects designed to support the efforts of the Government of Sudan in addressing the needs of at-risk young people and other vulnerable groups in communities and in camps for displaced people. The projects focus not only on developing vocational skills, and in many cases facilitating on-the-job training through community infrastructure rehabilitation and construction, but also on fostering reconciliation across Darfur.

As Mr. Elzarov points out, “DDR lays the groundwork for safeguarding and sustaining the communities in which former combatants can live as law-abiding citizens. Additionally, it provides them with alternative, viable ways of making a living, thereby, building national capacity for long-term peace, security and development.” ■

Women



Women Advocate for Peace in Darfur

As the ongoing peace process moves slowly but steadily forward, women in Darfur have started working actively to bring about peace and reconciliation in the region.

BY SHARON LUKUNKA

Since the beginning of the ongoing conflict in Darfur, women have become increasingly involved in the peace process. Darfuri women, today, are growing to enact active roles as agents of peace, occupying influential

positions within their communities and at the state and national levels. According to United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, “Countries with more gender equality have better economic growth. Companies with

more women leaders perform better. Peace agreements that include women are more durable. Parliaments with more women enact more legislation on key social issues such as health, education, anti-discrimination and child



On 3 November 2011, UNAMID, in collaboration with the North Darfur State Committee on Security Council Resolution 1325 State Committee, organized an Open Day session on UNSCR 1325 on women, peace and security in Dar El Salaam, North Darfur. The forum, which was attended by 80 participants including Government representatives, women leaders and UNAMID officials, identified the possible impact of the Resolution on daily life and key areas including protection, women's rights, participation in the peace process, socioeconomic empowerment, and so forth. Photo by Albert Gonzalez Farran, UNAMID.

“Achieving lasting peace in Darfur is only possible with the full inclusion of women in conflict resolution and decision-making processes. Our objective is to advocate for peaceful resolution of the ongoing conflict and emphasize the vital role that women must play within peace processes.”

—Magda Abdurrahman

Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, has served as a key mechanism to highlight women's issues in Darfur.

Resolution 1325 is essentially a legal framework that addresses the impact of war on women, along with the pivotal role women should and do play in conflict management, conflict resolution and sustainable peace. The Resolution calls for increased participation of women at all levels of decision-making, especially in preventing, managing and resolving conflict and in peace negotiations.

The Resolution stipulates that all parties to the armed conflict must take special measures to protect women and girls from gender-based violence and all other forms of violence in armed conflict. The Resolution also calls for strengthening women's rights under national law and supporting local women's peace initiatives and conflict-resolution processes.

A strong example of the positive way in which women can bolster peace efforts is Magda Abdurrahman, a school teacher from Zalingei, Central Darfur, who is an active participant in the ongoing peace efforts in Darfur. Ms. Abdurrahman revealed, how, upon

getting married at an early age to a local government employee and accompanying him across Darfur, she interacted with different communities, especially women. Upon seeing the needs of the local populations firsthand, she says, she joined one of the movements with the hope of ushering in a positive change; later she joined another splinter group which she eventually left to participate in the commencement of the Doha negotiations.

During these peace negotiations, women's groups played a major part in ensuring that women's needs are adequately addressed in the peace process. They also raised issues of concern within their communities including equal participation of women in decision-making positions. Out of 41 members of the Darfur Regional Authority, ten women were selected for high positions; most now hold important stations in government institutions.

On her part, Ms. Abdurrahman has been working to empower more women and ensure equal opportunities in government-run institutions. In 2011, she established a community-based organization, Al Tasamuh, which works to promote and empower Darfuri women and raise awareness in their communi-

support. The evidence is clear: equality for women means progress for all.”

In this context, the Government of Sudan, the African Union-United Nations Mission in Darfur (UNAMID) and various international and national nongovernmental organizations have been making the topic of encouraging and empowering women nearly ubiquitous at civil society workshops, cultural events and forums focused on women's rights. The United Nations' "Open Days" event, an annually celebrated follow-on to Security



On 14 December 2013, Leila Hassan Nebi, a resident of the Abu Shouk camp for internally displaced persons (IDPs) is pictured showing handcrafts made by her to UNAMID's female peacekeepers at the new El Raman Women's Shopping Centre which was built through the personal efforts of UNAMID's female Police Advisers. Photo by Albert González Farran, UNAMID.

“The presence of female peacekeepers is essential in Darfur, as the most affected people here are women and children.”

—Hester Paneras

ties. At the local level, Ms. Abdurrahman is also engaged in peace building and reconciliation efforts among different groups. Her organization recently signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Catholic Relief Service to conduct workshops among the farmers and pastoralists in Beija village, Central Darfur, to strengthen peaceful coexistence and prevent conflicts between the two groups.

“Achieving lasting peace in Darfur is only possible with the full inclusion of women in conflict resolution and decision-making processes. Our objective is to advocate for peaceful resolution of the ongoing conflict and emphasize the vital role that women must play within peace processes,” says Ms. Abdurrahman.

In keeping with its mandated aims, UNAMID continues to work toward encouraging the active participation of women and youth in peace building,

conflict resolution, and human rights at the local, regional and international level. The Mission regularly extends technical, logistic and programmatic support to the Government of Sudan and traditional institutions to raise awareness and improve the protective environment for vulnerable populations, especially women, youth and children, in Darfur, reveals Guang Cong, Chief, Civil Affairs Section, UNAMID. “Our workshops and seminars cover a broad range of topics, such as comprehensive roles in the peace processing, the roles of civil society organizations in democratic systems, and inclusive participation for all groups, including women and youth, in dialogue, mediation and negation,” says Mr. Cong.

In addition to this, since 2009, UNAMID has increased the number of female police officers in its on-ground operations, while, at the same time, encouraging the recruitment of wom-

en in local police services. As of February, the Mission's Police component includes more than 300 female Police Advisers representing 91 countries.

Female Police Advisers serve in many roles and work in all parts of Darfur, patrolling villages and camps for displaced people, assisting in addressing sexual and gender-based violence, building trust among Darfuris and promoting the rule of law. On a daily basis, female Police Advisers accompany their male counterparts on patrol in and around displaced persons camps and villages. While on patrol, peacekeepers assess the security situation in the area as well as interact with the local community and authorities on the ground.

“The presence of female peacekeepers is essential in Darfur, as the most affected people here are women and children,” says UNAMID Police Commissioner Hester Paneras, who cites incidents of rape as one example of how UNAMID's police women are making an impact. Commissioner Paneras explains that, in Darfur's cultural context, women typically would not report rape or talk about it with male authority figures. “But there is a change now,” she says. “My experience is that when they see another woman, their faces light up and find it easier to form a connection; they relate.”

This type of bond is exemplified in the work of the female Police Advisers in the Mission. Ms. Esther Agbo and Ms. Mary Kontomah, both of whom work as UNAMID Police Advisers, focus on gender issues in camps for internally displaced persons (IDPs). “These women look at us as their peers. We learn about each other's lives, lend a helping hand where possible and advise them on issues that affect their lives,” says Ms. Agbo.

Ms. Agbo, from Cameroon, serves as a Gender Officer in El Fasher, North Darfur, and has been with the Mission for two years, while Ms. Kontomah, who hails from Ghana, is currently serving as the Team Site Commander in Um Baru, North Darfur.

Each day, while remaining respect-

ful of local tradition and culture, they interact with women and girls at water points or in the market areas to discuss any notable developments, including the security situation and other challenges uniquely affecting women and children in the camps. “A majority of displaced women and girls have been severely affected by the conflict and, because of their culture, are unable to speak out. We advise them to report cases of sexual and gender-based violence to relevant authorities so that perpetrators can be brought to justice, while also educating them about how they are the fulcrum of the peace process,” reveals Ms. Kontomah.

Ms. Agbo and Ms. Kontomah also work closely with their female counterparts in the GoS Police. They are involved in mentoring of female police officers at the various family and child protection centres across Darfur to widen their local counterparts’ knowledge regarding current policing challenges, especially sexual and gender-based violence.

“Through capacity-building workshops, we try to educate our local counterparts on best practices when it comes to dealing with cases related to sexual violence against women, including the investigation process, interviewing survivors and providing victim support through establishing gender desks,” says Ms. Kontomah.

When conflict breaks out, both formal and informal negotiations and peace processes provide critical opportunities to reshape a country’s politics, security and broader socioeconomic landscape. By including women, these mechanisms expand the constituency contributing to conflict resolution, and create broader social buy-in to peace deals. This helps ensure that peace agreements are not narrow, elite pacts, and are supported and sustained by nations as a whole.

In Darfur, in particular, efforts designed to create an environment conducive to empowering women have been ongoing. Women’s groups in Darfur, such as the one set up by Ms. Abdurrahman, are increasingly being



On 18 February 2014, a female Police Adviser is pictured interacting with women at the Abu Shouk camp for the internally displaced, North Darfur, during an English class facilitated by UNAMID. Some 100 women, mostly adults and young mothers, attend these classes which are held in the camp thrice a week. Photo by Albert González Farran, UNAMID.

“A majority of displaced women and girls have been severely affected by the conflict and, because of their culture, are unable to speak out. We advise them to report cases of sexual and gender-based violence to relevant authorities so that perpetrators can be brought to justice, while also educating them about how they are the fulcrum of the peace process.”

—Mary Kontomah

recognized in their communities for their efforts to bring about peace and reconciliation in the region as well as their efforts to raise awareness on issues such as women’s rights, gender-based violence and importance of education for girls.

While significant progress has been made across the region with regard to the economic, social and political empowerment of women, more needs to be done as the long conflict has left much of the social and economic burden to the women, especially in keeping family and community structures intact. In an earlier interview with *Voices of Darfur*, Ms. Nabila Abdulkarim, a legal advisor at the Ministry of Justice in North Darfur, had summed up the role of women in Darfur with simple

elegance: “Women in Darfur are the backbones of their families,” she said.

It is in acknowledgement of this crucial role played by women that UNAMID and other relevant stakeholders, including the government, have been supporting the inclusion of women in all spheres of life, including the establishment of sustainable peace.

As Ms. Agbo says, “Our daily interactions with the local populations in Darfur lead us to believe that women are steadily getting more involved in their communities; they are no longer content with being restricted to traditional roles and are pushing for their own rights and for participation in the peace process.” ■

Crafts that Ease Economic Hardship

The ongoing conflict in Darfur has resulted in an unstable economy and an infrastructure that is in disrepair. In the midst of this, Darfuri women continue to create intricate handicrafts that not only represent a cultural inheritance handed down through generations but also often serve as their only means of survival.

BY HAMID ABDULSALAM

Darfuri women play a vital role within the family and community structures in the region. While most of them perform many of the traditional tasks commonly associated in Darfuri culture with the roles of wife, mother, sister and daughter, they also frequently contribute toward generating income for their households. With the massive displacements that have taken place in the past decade, women have increasingly begun to take on the role of breadwinner in the fractured families that inhabit the camps for the displaced. Craft, especially weaving items such as food covers, baskets, mats, ropes, hats and so forth, from palm leaves, a readily available raw material across Darfur, has proved to be a staple small business that enables these women to fulfil their basic needs.

Halima Adam, a resident of the Abu Shouk camp for internally displaced persons in North Darfur, says she has been making baskets, food covers and mats for more than 10 years. According to Ms. Adam, she learned the art of weaving mats from her grandmother when she was a child. A widow with several children, Ms. Adam is the primary provider in her family and reveals that selling such

crafts in the market enables her to ensure that her children can attend school. “After the death of my husband, we have been living solely on the income I generate through these crafts,” says Ms. Adam. She also claims that she has some regular customers for whom she creates woven objects on order.

As Ms. Adam’s example illustrates, there is a wide and regular demand for such handmade items across the region as they are relatively inexpensive and made of natural constituents. Local consumers, therefore, prefer such handcrafted items over factory-manufactured plastic goods. In addition to this, many Darfuri communities, especially those who live in the rural areas, use objects made of palm leaf for a variety of purposes and occasions, including weddings and other community events. In fact, young women are often taught the art of weaving objects by the elders of the family; as such handicrafts are considered to be part of the cultural heritage of Darfur.

This photo essay highlights the generations-old craft of using palm leaves to make specific products and is a tribute to the Darfuri craftswomen who struggle every day to make ends meet and provide for their families. ■



- 1 On 15 October 2014, Ms. Hawa Ali, a resident of the Abu Shouk camp for the internally displaced, North Darfur, is pictured here weaving a food cover from palm leaves. With the massive displacements that have taken place in the past decade, Darfuri women have increasingly begun to take on the role of breadwinner in the fractured families that inhabit the camps for the displaced.
- 2 On 25 January 2015, Ms. Halima Adam, originally from Korma, displays a handwoven basket made from palm leaves in the Abu Shouk camp for the internally displaced. A widow with several children, Ms. Adam is the primary provider in her family and reveals that selling such crafts in the market enables her to ensure that her children can attend school.
- 3 On 25 January 2015, Essaq Adam is pictured wearing a handcrafted hat made of palm leaves woven by Ms. Halima Adam, in the El Fasher market, North Darfur. Ms. Adam says she has some regular customers for whom she creates woven objects on order.







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4 There is a wide and regular demand for handmade items, such as the woven hat pictured here, across Darfur as they are relatively inexpensive and made of natural constituents. Local consumers, therefore, prefer it over factory-manufactured plastic goods.

5 On 25 January 2015, Ms. Khadija Adam, is pictured preparing a woven item in the Abu Shouk camp for internally displaced persons (IDPs). Young women are often taught the art of weaving objects by the elders of the family, as such handicrafts are considered to be part of the cultural heritage of Darfur.

6 Many Darfuri communities, especially those who live in the rural areas, use objects made of palm leaf for a variety of purposes and occasions, including weddings and other community events.

7 On 25 January 2015, Ms. Halima Adam, originally from Korma, is pictured here carrying handcrafted rope made from palm leaves in the Abu Shouk camp for the internally displaced in El Fasher, North Darfur. Craft, especially weaving items from palm leaves, a readily available raw material across Darfur, has proved to be a staple small business that enables displaced women to fulfil their basic needs.

8 On 15 October 2014, Ms. Fatima Essa, makes a food cover to sell in the market and generate income. Handcraft has become a staple small business for displaced Darfuri women.

9 On 15 October 2014, Ms. Fatima Essa, makes a food cover to sell in the market and generate income. The generations-old craft of using palm leaves to make specific products is a common skill among the women of Darfur.



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9

Performing for Peace: Mohamad Yusuf Andokai

Noted theatre artist Mohamed Yusuf Andokai speaks about his passion for solo acts, his views on theatre in Darfur and how performance art can play a pivotal role in ushering in positive social change.

BY EMADELDIN RIJAL



Darfuri theatre artist, Mohamed Yusuf Andokai, is pictured here with a fellow actor. Mr. Andokai, who is known for his solo performances, says he believes a one-man act is an immense challenge and reveals that it is the area of performance art that interests him the most. Photo by Hamid Abdulsalam, UNAMID.

Born in 1984, in El Geneina, the capital of West Darfur, Mohamed Andokai says his interest in the performing arts began at a very young age and continues till now. Following his childhood passion, he enrolled in the College for Music and Drama, Sudan University of Sciences and Technology, but could not complete his education on account of personal hardships.

However, his commitment to his craft led him to pursue theatre profes-

sionally and, over the years, he has won awards and critical acclaim. One of his most noteworthy performances continues to be the solo act titled 'El Geneina: Between Past and Present,' which has gone on to win several prestigious awards. Additionally, Mr. Andokai has taken part in various cultural festivals across Darfur and Sudan.

In an interview with *Voices of Darfur*, Mr. Andokai shares his views on theatre art in Darfur and how performance

artists across the region are working, through dramatization, to effect a positive social change.

Voices of Darfur: Tell us how you started acting and taking theatre seriously.

Andokai: My interest in theatre started in school. I was active in the school dramatics team and my teachers encouraged me greatly. In some time I found myself participating in theatrical activities in my locality. As

soon as I started performing in public, I became a member of a new drama group comprised of young school-children. Performing with this group strengthened my determination and motivation to become a theatre professional as well as convinced me that I could be a successful actor.

VoD: Did you ever perform alone when you were at school or were you always part of a team?

Andokai: Yes, I often performed alone, even when I was in school. My teachers would often ask me to perform on any topic and I would present a show for a few minutes on my own, though I still enacted roles with others in the dramatics team.

VoD: In your opinion, what does a solo act require to be successful and connect with the audience?

Andokai: Any performer who goes onstage with a solo act has to be completely focused and possess a high degree of concentration so as to engage the audience fully from the beginning of the performance. Also, I feel, one-man acts require more practice than a group performance.

VoD: How did you develop your skills in solo performances?

Andokai: A one-man act has always been my biggest challenge and also the area of performance art that interests me the most. I have received advice and instruction on performing solo from numerous experienced theatre directors, which has helped me to progress and evolve. I also watch and read about different performers, both from Sudan and other countries, to gain knowledge and enhance my own craft. In addition to this, I ensure I have enough rehearsal time so that that I am fully prepared. But, above all, my moral courage enables me to break the ice and reach out, interact immediately with the audience.

VoD: Words and dialogue are powerful tools in performing arts. How do you incorporate this aspect into your act?

Andokai: I have benefited a lot from



Darfuri theatre artist Mohamed Yusuf Andokai says that he attempts, through his performances, to contribute in a small way to peace in Darfur. On the personal front, he reveals that he would like to become an internationally known theatre personality. Photo by Hamid Abdulsalam, UNAMID.

“I take this opportunity to call on those who are involved in the conflict, either directly or indirectly, to embrace dialogue as a genuine vehicle for peace and stability in the region.”

the rich cultural heritage of Darfur while performing on stage. For instance, I use the common indigenous language to convey the essence of my act to every member of the audience. I also use traditional accessories to enhance the spoken word during my shows.

VoD: Do you feel that solo acts are increasingly becoming more popular in Darfur?

Andokai: As a matter of fact, one-person theatre is common in Darfur. However, its success depends heavily on an effective performance and the

strength of the messages conveyed. It is also a quick, instant form of reaching out to a live audience. The advantage of a solo act is that it is less expensive than other forms of theatre.

VoD: What, according to you, are some of the biggest challenges you face as a theatre artist? How do you deal with them?

Andokai: One of the biggest challenges theatre artists across Darfur face is lack of support and the volatile security situation. I cannot perform freely in public unless I am assured it is safe. The prevailing insecurity also makes it difficult for us to travel and propagate our craft to wider audiences in Darfur as well as in the federal capital, Khartoum. Also, theatres in Darfur mostly lack basic infrastructure such as wireless mikes and loudspeakers.

However, because I feel passionately about the messages I wish to convey to the audience, I sometimes work on a voluntary basis with humanitarian organizations. These organizations have been very supportive in facilitating me and my team members to take our messages to a cross-section of the local communities.

VoD: Tell us a bit about the core messages you choose to convey through drama.

Andokai: Most of our performances deal with some of the contemporary issues faced by Darfuris, such as ethnic violence and the violence against women as well as the importance of education. We also have presented shows that sensitize communities about harmful practices such as female genital mutilation.

VoD: Could you tell us about some of the cultural festivals you have participated in and the awards you have received?

Andokai: I have been regularly participating in global ceremonies such as International Women's Day and World AIDS Day. Other notable festivals I have been part of at the local and national level include the Sudan Cultural Nights in 2012 and the Sudan Youth Cultural Festival in 2013. Both events were held in Khartoum. On both these occasions, I was singled out among other performers and received awards for



Darfuri theatre artist Mohamed Yusuf Andokai is pictured here rehearsing one of his acts with a fellow actor. Mr. Andokai has received many awards and accolades for his unique solo performances. Photo by Hamid Abdulsalam, UNAMID.

Best Actor and Best Performance from the Federal Ministry of Culture. I also won similar awards at Sudan's first Festival of Interactive Theatre in 2012. At the local level, I received an award for Best Performance in the Dar Andoka Cultural Festival held in El Geneina in 2009.

VoD: How has winning these awards impacted your career?

Andokai: I am very proud to have won these awards and, I believe, they motivate me to achieve greater heights and work harder to perform better.

VoD: How do you view theatre in Darfur in current times?

Andokai: Darfur has a great wealth of young talent when it comes to theatre and drama. Despite the scarcity of resources and lack of support, theatre artists across the region have been working toward contributing to community awareness through their craft. The same is true of theatre professionals in other parts of Sudan. For example, I represented West Darfur on many occasions in Khartoum and other places across the country and have successfully managed to engage various audiences. Similarly, other artists have also been making their mark. However, theatre, as an art form, needs more support in order to enhance the vital role it can play in Darfuri society.

VoD: What are your opinions regarding the ongoing peace process here?

Andokai: Peace is a shared responsibility and a process that starts at the grassroots level.

To pave the way for peace, we need to renounce violence. Darfur has long suffered from the effects of the devastating conflicts triggered by ignorance; these clashes must stop to usher in reconstruction and development. I take this opportunity to call on those who are involved in the conflict, either directly or indirectly, to embrace dialogue as a genuine vehicle for peace and stability in the region.

VoD: What are your personal hopes and aspirations for the future?

Andokai: I hope, through my performances, to contribute in a small way to peace in Darfur. On the personal front, I would like to become an internationally known theatre personality. Therefore, I am keen to resume formal studies at the College for Music and Drama. I would also like to establish a foundation for performing arts and development. The foundation, which is already underway, will focus on delivering messages to help strengthen the social fabric in Darfur and raise awareness about issues related to health, education and environment.

VoD: Do you have any message for the people of Darfur?


Andokai: The more we continue to fight each other, the more we have divisions. I would like to exhort the people of Darfur to embrace tolerance and forgiveness to put the long years of conflict behind them.



Pictured here is renowned Darfuri theatre artist, Mohamed Yusuf Andokai. Mr. Andokai says he believes that the performing arts can positively influence the ongoing peace process across Darfur. Photo by Hamid Abdulsalam, UNAMID.



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