

UNAMID's publication for the people of Darfur

VOICES

of Darfur

MARCH 2014

Harmonizing Darfur

An Interview with
Omar Ihsas

**Working with
Communities for Peace**

*Partnerships to address
conflict's root causes*

**Attitudes Shift on
Female Circumcision**

*Slow but steady change on
traditional practice*

**Nyala Evolves with
Displacement, Development**

*From quiet trade hub to
bustling metropolis*



AFRICAN UNION - UNITED NATIONS
MISSION IN DARFUR
(UNAMID)



On 2 December 2013 in Khartoum, Sudan, members of Mr. Omar Ihsas' band prepare for a music concert. Mr. Ihsas, who says music can be an effective tool in bringing about social change, promotes peace in his compositions. Photo by Albert González Farran, UNAMID.

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EDITOR'S NOTE

I'm pleased to introduce the March 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.

In "Working with Communities for Peace," Ms. Sharon Lukunka describes how UNAMID's Civil Affairs personnel are playing a complex and vital role in helping to rebuild trust at the community level and re-establish a culture of peace in the conflict-torn region of Darfur. As this story illustrates, Civil Affairs is supporting the Mission's mandate to protect civilians by building strong relationships to address the root causes of the conflict and working at the political and local levels through mediation and reconciliation initiatives designed to restore peace and trust.

In "Attitudes Shift on Female Circumcision," Mr. Emadeldin Rijal describes how the global campaign to identify female circumcision as female genital mutilation is resulting in a slow but steady change. In Darfur, community leaders and health workers say the ongoing efforts to deal with female circumcision are contributing to hope that future generations will not be subjected to this practice. These efforts, in Darfur and abroad, are being undertaken in ways that can raise awareness about this sensitive issue without upsetting deeply held beliefs.

In "Darfur's Struggle for Water," Mr. Albert González Farran presents a photo essay designed to highlight the water problems in this region. As competition over Darfur's natural water resources is one of the major drivers of the decade-long conflict

here, UNAMID and its partners have been working to address this issue. Even so, the hardships faced by the Darfuri population during the unrelenting dry season are severe, especially in the numerous camps for IDPs that are spread across the Darfuri landscape and grouped near urban areas.

In "Nyala Evolves with Displacement, Development," Mr. Mohamad Almahady writes about Sudan's second largest city as an example of the challenges towns in Darfur are facing due to the ongoing conflict and the resulting strain on an already overburdened infrastructure. Mr. Almahady describes how, following many years of quiet economic growth, Darfur's conflict and resulting population displacements have altered Nyala's cultural and economic dimensions rapidly, transforming Nyala from a trading hub into a bustling, cosmopolitan city.

Finally, in our cover feature, "Harmonizing Darfur," Ms. Ala Mayyahi presents an interview with Mr. Omar Ihsas, an internationally renowned Sudanese musician with roots in Darfur. Mr. Ihsas' coupling of local beats and melodies with lyrics about peace helped paved the way to a national following in Sudan and international success in the United Kingdom, China, the United States and Canada. Now a well-known international celebrity, Mr. Ihsas says he remains dedicated to Darfur and its struggle for peace.

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.

Kirk L. Kroeker
Head of Publications

ON THE COVER



Sudanese singer Mr. Omar Ihsas pauses for a photograph prior to a concert in Khartoum. Photo by Albert González Farran, UNAMID.



A girl is dressed in her school uniform in the Abu Shouk camp for displaced people. Photo by Albert González Farran, UNAMID.

VOICES of Darfur

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All Parties Urged to Join Darfur Peace Effort



On 23 January 2014 in Khartoum, Sudan, UNAMID JSR Mohamed Ibn Chambas briefs national and international media during a conference at the Mission's Khartoum offices. Photo by Albert González Farran, UNAMID.

The security situation in Darfur deteriorated during 2013 and remains volatile, a senior United Nations official told the Security Council on 23 January 2014, while calling on all sides to join negotiations aimed at achieving a permanent ceasefire and comprehensive peace. Recent months have also been marked by a significant worsening of the humanitarian situation, continued attacks on UN and relief personnel and limited progress in the implementation by the signatories of the Doha Document for Peace in Darfur (DDPD), Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations Hervé Ladsous said in his briefing.

He said that while the signatories achieved some limited progress with the Doha Document—which forms the basis for a permanent ceasefire and comprehensive peace agreement to end the fighting that began in 2003—these successes did not yield direct and significant benefits to the general population of Darfur. “The parties must accelerate the implementation of out-

standing provisions of the agreement, with an increased focus on tangible benefits to local communities, including the close to two million displaced,” he stated.

So far, the Government of Sudan and two major armed movements have committed to the Document: the Liberation and Justice Movement (LJM) and the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM). The Joint Special Representative of the African Union and the UN for Darfur, Dr. Mohamed Ibn Chambas, told the press in Khartoum, Sudan, on the same day that he will scale up efforts to pave the way for serious talks between the Government and those groups that have not yet signed the Document.

“The Mediation will explore every means possible—national, regional and international partners—to influence all sides to join the negotiating table to achieve the true comprehensive peace that the people of Darfur deserve,” said Dr. Chambas. “While overall peace and security are critical, the actual needs of the people on the ground can only be addressed by

instituting a strong development agenda that improves the socio-economic conditions in Darfur and encourages the return of the vast internally displaced and refugee populations languishing for more than a decade in camps scattered across Darfur and neighbouring countries,” he added.

The total number of internally displaced people has increased to almost two million, with an estimated 400,000 people having been forced to flee new outbreaks of conflict last year, Mr. Ladsous noted in his briefing. “Protracted displacement, food

insecurity and a lack of basic services drive chronic vulnerability in the region,” he stated, adding that malnutrition rates are above emergency thresholds in all five of Darfur’s states and less than 10 per cent of the population has access to both clean water and improved sanitation.

Mr. Ladsous added that humanitarian needs are expected to remain high this year in Darfur, where an estimated 300,000 people have died since fighting between armed movements and Government forces and their allies began in 2003. A total of 3.5 million people, approximately 30 per cent of Darfur’s population, currently receive humanitarian assistance from the international community.

Highlighting the significant threats to UN and humanitarian personnel in the region, Mr. Ladsous reported that 16 peacekeepers were killed as a result of hostile acts in Darfur throughout 2013—a 50 per cent increase compared to the previous year. This brings to 57 the number of personnel killed since UNAMID was deployed in 2008. “The Government of Sudan must investigate and expeditiously bring to justice the perpetrators,” he stressed. ▀

On 23 January 2014, the Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations Hervé Ladsous briefs the UN Security Council on Darfur, Sudan, at the UN headquarters in New York. Photo by Paulo Filgueiras, UN Photo.



UNAMID's Head Meets Darfuri Armed Movements in Kampala

Beginning on 10 February 2014 in Kampala, Uganda, UNAMID Joint Special Representative and AU-UN Joint Chief Mediator Mohamed Ibn Chambas met with the leadership of the Darfuri non-signatory movements during a three-day visit to the country.

The Joint Chief Mediator met with the leaders of Sudan Liberation Army-Abdul Wahid (SLA-AW), Sudan Liberation Army-Minni Minawi (SLA-MM) and Justice and Equality Movement-Gibril Ibrahim (JEM-Gibril) to follow up on the outcomes of a meeting held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia from 9 to 11 December 2013.

"I am encouraged by my discussions with the movements and their positive but cautious consideration of the

Government's calls for reconciliation and national dialogue," said Dr. Chambas. "As the mediation, we will engage with all the parties to turn these hopeful signs into concrete steps toward peace for Darfur and Sudan."

Earlier, in the December 2013 meeting, Dr. Chambas met with representatives from SLA-MM and the JEM-Gibril. At that meeting, Dr. Chambas said he welcomed the willingness of the participants to move forward into a peaceful and negotiated settlement of the conflict.

"We are ready to continue engaging with all the non-signatory movements to bring them on board the peace process and find a durable solution for the Darfur conflict," he said. "The only way forward is through dialogue, not violence."



On 10 February 2014 in Kampala, Uganda, Dr. Mohamed Ibn Chambas meets with the leadership of the Darfuri non-signatory movements during a three-day visit to the country. Photo by Luce Remy, UNAMID.

In a press statement following the Addis meeting, JEM-Gibril and SLA-MM emphasized the importance of paving the way to a comprehensive, inclusive, just and durable peace. In

their jointly released statement, the two movements expressed their commitment to respect and promote the principles of international humanitarian law and human rights. ■

Shangil Tobaya, North Darfur



On 11 February 2014 in Shangil Tobaya, North Darfur, a resident of the Nifasha camp for displaced people greets his colleagues before helping distribute goods from World Food Programme trucks. The WFP convoy, protected by UNAMID peacekeepers, travelled 100 kilometres from El Fasher to Shangil Tobaya to deliver 350 metric tonnes of food. Photo by Albert Gonzalez Farran, UNAMID.

Salaya, East Darfur



On 6 February 2014 in Salaya, East Darfur, UNAMID inaugurated two quick-impact projects as part of the Missions' ongoing efforts to improve education and healthcare facilities for the semi-nomadic communities living in the area. Photo by Abdulrasheed Yakubu, UNAMID.

Darfur's All-Inclusive Dialogue Process Beginning

Delegates to a planning workshop for the Darfur Internal Dialogue and Consultation (DIDC) mechanism, a key part of the peace process stipulated in the Doha Document for Peace in Darfur (DDPD), convened on 18 February at the University of El Fasher, North Darfur. The event brought together more than 60 people from the five Darfur states to deliberate on the procedures for conducting the dialogue and consultation process at the locality, state and regional levels.

The primary objectives of the DIDC include consolidating peace by promoting dialogue and confidence-building, and by encouraging reconciliation and unity among the people of Darfur, in particular, and Sudan, in general.

"You are experienced men and women who have devoted a lot of effort, energy and time in the search for lasting and durable

peace in Darfur," said UNAMID Joint Special Representative Mohamed Ibn Chambas in his remarks to open the workshop. "Let us use this opportunity to see how we can build a culture of peace and cooperation and understanding to be a significant part of the national dialogue."

El Fasher University Vice-Chancellor Osman Abduljabar Osman said that if the efforts made by the Sudanese Government, UNAMID and other parties are well used, they can lead to a durable peace in Darfur. "We are optimistic at the signs of peace," he said. "The more important thing is not only to bring peace, but also to make it lasting and sustainable."

The United Nations, the African Union and the State of Qatar are facilitating the DIDC process. Ahead of the first workshop to launch the consultation mecha-



On 18 February 2014, an actress of the Marafi drama group performs during the launch of the DIDC mechanism at El Fasher University's Peace Centre. Photo by Albert González Farran, UNAMID.

nism, UNAMID facilitated a broad survey across Darfur to gauge interest in and understanding of the DIDC process. While some survey results remain in the process of being tabulated, the vast majority of the respondents indicated they are knowledgeable about the DDPD and believe that it can address Darfur's problems.

The DIDC meetings and

outreach events are expected to take place in the months ahead, bringing together all Darfur stakeholders to deliberate on the DDPD's implementation, make recommendations for the way forward and, ultimately, help steer the peace agreement's provisions toward effective delivery of tangible results for the people of Darfur. ■

Tripartite Meeting Focuses on Troop Deployment, Equipment

On 2 February 2014 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, discussion of the seventeenth meeting of the Tripartite Coordination Mechanism focused on delays in deployment of personnel and equipment. The forum, consisting of representatives of the Government of Sudan, the African Union and the United Nations, was held at the African Union's headquarters on the margins of the African Union Summit.

At the meeting, participants discussed the deployment of uniformed personnel in UNAMID and clearance of contingent-owned equipment. Delegates agreed that the Government would work with the Mission to facilitate the speedy deployment of troops to UNAMID to avoid operational gaps in Darfur.

Other topics of concern included the lack of freedom of movement and the deterioration in the security situation in Darfur during 2013, largely due to tribal conflicts and the serious consequences they have had on the protection of civilians and in the delivery of humanitarian assistance.

The participants welcomed the technical cooperation that has led to the resolution of outstanding issues, such as pending visas, customs clearances and land leasing. "The tripartite meetings at both the high level and the technical level have improved the Mission's effectiveness in delivering on its mandate," said UNAMID Joint Special Representative Mohamed Ibn Chambas. "We hope to continue to work closely with the Government



On 10 February 2014 in El Fasher, North Darfur, UNAMID troops escort a convoy of World Food Programme trucks traveling to Shangil Tobaya, North Darfur, to deliver much-needed assistance to internally displaced people in the area. Photo by Albert Gonzalez Farran, UNAMID.

and welcome its cooperation in all areas of operations."

The delegations were headed by Ambassador Rahamtalla Mohamed Osman, Sudan Under-Secretary for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; Ambassador Smail Chergui, African Union

Commissioner for Peace and Security; Mr. Hervé Ladsous, United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations; and, Ms. Ameerah Haq, United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Field Support. ■

Zalingei, Central Darfur



On 16 February 2014 in Zalingei, Central Darfur, the Independent Expert on Human Rights in Sudan, Mr. Mashood A. Baderin, examines a prison during his visit to Sudan to follow up on his previous visit's recommendations. During his time in Darfur, Mr. Baderin also visited El Fasher, Nyala and El Geneina, in North, South and West Darfur, respectively. Photo by Albert González Farran, UNAMID.

El Fasher, North Darfur



On 6 February 2014 in the Abu Shouk camp for displaced people in North Darfur, Babaginah and his mother Khabiba, originally from Kutum, meet with community leader Adam Ali Mohamed, who visited the mother and child to check on their living conditions and learn about their current needs. Photo by Albert González Farran, UNAMID.

UNAMID Head Emphasizes Reconciliation in West Darfur

On 25 January 2014, UNAMID Joint Special Representative (JSR) Mohamed Ibn Chambas concluded a visit to El Geneina, West Darfur, where he met with local authorities and participated in a conference organised by the Darfur Regional Authority (DRA).

Speaking at the opening ceremony of the Social Peace Conference, JSR Chambas underlined the significance of reconciliation. "I would like to reaffirm today UNAMID's support for social peace and reconciliation initiatives in Darfur, within the scope of our mandate and capacity," he said.

The head of UNAMID

said that signing peace agreements is not enough. "The real work begins only after that, while putting to practice what we have pledged," he stated. "Out of war, trust must be rebuilt, both among the different communities that have been in conflict and among people and their Government institutions."

The JSR noted that such conferences present a platform for discussing how conflicts start and what would be needed to build trust. During a meeting with the Governor (Wali) of West Darfur, JSR Chambas assured Mr. Haidar Atim of the Mission's commitment and cooperation with the State Government



On 25 January 2014, UNAMID Joint Special Representative Mohamed Ibn Chambas concluded a visit to El Geneina, West Darfur, where he met with local authorities and participated in a conference organised by the Darfur Regional Authority. Photo by Muntasir Sharafadin, UNAMID.

to provide better services to the people. He mentioned that, after 10 years of conflict, the time has come to rebuild Darfur and focus on infrastructure projects.

CIVIL AFFAIRS

Working with Communities for Peace

UNAMID's Civil Affairs personnel 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.

BY SHARON LUKUNKA



On 16 July 2013 in El Sereif, North Darfur, children welcome the arrival of a UNAMID delegation and request support with handwritten signs. In early January 2013, a dispute over the ownership of a gold mine in Jebel Amir, North Darfur, led to tribal clashes and hostilities that resulted in an estimated 100 deaths and the displacement of some 100,000 people to the villages of Kabkabiya, Saraf Omra and El Sereif. UNAMID's Civil Affairs section conducted reconciliation workshops with the feuding tribes to resolve the dispute. Photo by Albert González Farran, UNAMID.

In early January 2013, a dispute over the ownership of a gold mine in Jebel Amir, North Darfur, led to tribal clashes and hostilities that resulted in an estimated 100 deaths and the displacement of some 100,000 people. The fighting began on 5 January, and the subsequent looting and burning of nearby villages forced thousands to flee southward toward the villages of Kabkabiya, Saraf Omra and El Sereif.

On 7 January, UNAMID dispatched personnel to Jebel Amir and met with the Wali (Governor) of North Darfur to discuss ways to support mediation and reconciliation efforts to bring the disputing tribes together. As the Mission conducted mediation work to bring about a peaceful solution to the feud, the Mission increased the number of daily patrols in the affected areas. The negotiations led to an initial ceasefire agreement signed on 18 January in Saraf Omra. However, the fighting in

North Darfur resumed, resulting in additional casualties and displacements.

A key part of such mediation efforts is UNAMID's Civil Affairs component, which works closely with Government representatives and disputing tribes to end hostilities. In preparation for reconciliation conferences to end similar feuds, Civil Affairs hosts a series of workshops separately with the disputing parties. In the Jebel Amir case, reconciliation workshops began in March, with

the support of UNAMID and the Wali of North Darfur; they resulted in a peace agreement on 27 July 2013.

The Jebel Amir issue is one of many similar problems that Civil Affairs is working to solve by directly supporting local mediation. Civil Affairs personnel, a vital part of UNAMID's substantive operations, were first active in Darfur in 2005 as part of the United Nations Mission in Sudan (UNMIS) and also the former African Union Mission in the Sudan (AMIS). The section's objectives include building confidence in and raising awareness about United Nations and African Union work, along with facilitating dialogue between the Mission and the local community. By the time UNAMID was deployed to Darfur in early 2008, Civil Affairs personnel already had made significant inroads in local communities.

In 2008, the United Nations Departments of Peacekeeping Operations and Field Support approved a directive on the multifaceted role of Civil Affairs personnel in UN missions. This directive formally maps out three core areas that fall under the Civil Affairs: cross-mission representation, including monitoring and facilitating the peace process at the local level; confidence-building, including supporting reconciliation and the resolution of conflict; and support to restoration activities, including strengthening and extending state authority and governance institutions.

In Darfur, UNAMID's Civil Affairs personnel, deployed in all states here, work at the social, administrative and subnational political levels to facilitate the implementation of the Mission's mandate. The section supports the Government and the Darfuri population in establishing conditions and structures conducive to achieving peace. "Civil Affairs Officers are primarily enablers, facilitators and problem-solvers looking for opportunities to support and leverage the work of other actors, particularly local actors, to make connections and to help build on existing dynam-

"Civil Affairs Officers are primarily enablers, facilitators and problem-solvers looking for opportunities to support and leverage the work of other actors, particularly local actors, to make connections and to help build on existing dynamics."

—Retta Reddy

ics," says Ms. Retta Reddy, Chief of UNAMID's Civil Affairs section. "As a section, Civil Affairs can facilitate or directly implement tasks that require a cross-cutting approach, such as the protection of civilians."

In carrying out its mandates and performing its roles in Darfur, Civil Affairs works 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 and United Nations agencies.

One notable example of this work with many segments of society is the Doha peace process, which Civil Affairs personnel supported broadly at the local level in Darfur and also internationally in Doha, Qatar. This support contributed to the success of Doha I in November 2009 and Doha II in July 2010. Eventually, the participation and dialogue led to the signing of the Doha Document for Peace in Darfur (DDPD) in July 2011. Following the signing ceremony, Civil Affairs played a vital role in disseminating the DDPD, conducting more than 140 workshops across Darfur and in Khartoum, to raise awareness about its provisions. More than 25,000 people attended these workshops.

Ms. Reddy explains that, currently, she and the Civil Affairs team are work-

ing to promote a culture of peace and helping to resolve Darfur's local conflicts. This work, she says, is essential in building support for the overall peace process. In conducting this work, Civil Affairs is supporting a broad variety of activities designed to enable all stakeholders—including civil society groups, women's groups, youth groups, IDPs and native administration leaders—to address the root causes of the conflict here.

"As the primary mechanism for this general goal, we conduct training sessions, workshops and seminars that target different community groups to cultivate effective leadership skills for peace building," says Ms. Reddy. "Our workshops and seminars have covered a broad range of topics, including roles that need to be filled within the peace process, the roles of civil society organizations in democratic systems and inclusive participation in dialogue, mediation and negotiation."

Mr. Emadeldine Ahmed Salim, Deputy Director for the Centre for Peace and Development Studies at the University of El Fasher, explains that, since 2011, the Centre has been working closely with UNAMID's Civil Affairs section to organize workshops on democracy, peace and conflict. "In collaboration with UNAMID's Civil Affairs section, we have conducted several peace-building sessions in El Fasher, Kabkabiya, Saraf Omra and Um Kadada in North Darfur, bringing together different segments of the community including men, women, and young people," he says.



On 27 July 2013, at the offices of the Wali (Governor) of North Darfur, members of the Beni Hussein tribe cheer during the signing ceremony for an agreement designed to end the dispute with the Abbala related to the Jebel Amir goldmine. UNAMID's Civil Affairs section conducted mediation and reconciliation workshops leading up to the final signing ceremony. Photo by Albert González Farran, UNAMID.

Given the number of inter- and intra-tribal conflicts in Darfur, many of Civil Affairs' activities have involved promoting and facilitating local-level mediation and reconciliation efforts designed to restore peace and trust. UNAMID's Civil Affairs personnel have supported mediation in several conflicts involving different ethnic communities, facilitated reconciliation efforts and provided support to sustain local peace agreements and promote traditional reconciliation mechanisms.

In a recent example, on 3 April 2013, the Salamat and the Misseriya tribes in East 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. So, in addition to working with local and regional authorities, and with the involvement of the affected communities themselves, a key conflict-resolution strategy that the section has been working to implement is a pre-emptive approach 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. "To help local communities run smoothly, UNAMID's Civil Affairs section has held many meetings and conducted several workshops, all designed to cultivate effective mediation skills and foster an attitude conducive to the prevention and management of conflict through dialogue," says Ms. Reddy. "Because some of the root causes of local-level conflicts include access to water points, land ownership and natural resources, our workshops have specifically focused on mediation related to these topics."

Ms. Reddy explains that, despite the establishment of these committees across Darfur, there remains a great need to put in place a systematic programme for Darfur-wide resource management. "Disarmament of various armed groups must take place before there is enough stability to work out equitable access to natural resources," she says.

Another part of Civil Affairs work is capacity-building. The many quick-im-

pact projects (QIPs) implemented by the section are designed not only to help rebuild Darfur's infrastructure, but also to build the capacity of community leaders, civil society organizations and women. Civil Affairs and other UNAMID components have implemented more than 600 QIPs across Darfur in areas such as health, education, and water. These projects have had an impact in the communities where they are conducted by improving quality of life and providing necessary facilities and services.

One recent QIP supported by Civil Affairs was the construction of a hospital in Malha, North Darfur. The Mission constructed a maternity ward, including a waiting room, a doctor's office and abortion facilities for the patients. Dr. Omer Sulieman Abdulmoniem, the head of the Malha Hospital, said the facility is the only medical centre in the area, and pointed out that, previously, the hospital had no maternity ward and consisted of one single room with hardly any equipment. "With the help of UNAMID's Civil Affairs section, health facilities in Malha have greatly improved and we are now equipped to assist the community," he says.

In its work at the institutional level, Civil Affairs is helping build the capacity of Darfur's government branches to help strengthen democratic principles. "The Mission is working on good governance issues related to marginalization, transparency, accountability, good leadership and the environment," says Ms. Reddy, who explains that the section is providing training in peace building and the role of civil society in democratic systems. "Civil Affairs is making an effort to plant the seed of democratic governance, accountability and transparency in Darfur," she says.

One aspect of these training sessions is a focus on revitalizing Darfur's traditional conflict-resolution mechanisms, opening up opportunities for the communities to either agree or disagree on issues, and help them discuss problems, such as access to water points for both nomads and farmers, without resorting to violence. "Such training sessions, workshops and dialogues are invaluable tools that help Darfuris build on the culture of peace, tolerance and understanding, and

thereby create an atmosphere of mutual respect and harmony," says Ms. Reddy.

Looking ahead, the Chief of Civil Affairs says, the section will continue to work on ways to address the root causes of the conflict in Darfur, much as it did in 2013 with several workshops, seminars and meetings focused on resolving tribal conflicts over land and other natural resources. These meetings provided an opportunity to cultivate a better understanding of the Mission's work and the principles of impartial peacekeeping. And they served as platforms for UNAMID personnel to strengthen ties with community leaders and local authorities.

In each of the roles identified here, the work of Civil Affairs intersects with the

activities of other UNAMID sections, UN agencies and nongovernmental organizations. While much has been achieved by Civil Affairs personnel and their partners, more remains to be done. In the future, says Ms. Reddy, Civil Affairs will continue to support the Mission's mandate to protect civilians by building relationships with all stakeholders in addressing the root causes of the conflict. 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 are measures designed to create a stable environment that provides protection to civilians. ■

"To help local communities run smoothly, UNAMID's Civil Affairs section has held many meetings and conducted several workshops, all designed to cultivate effective mediation skills and foster an attitude conducive to the prevention and management of conflict through dialogue."

—Retta Reddy

On 17 March 2013 in El Fasher, North Darfur, Ms. Retta Reddy, Chief of UNAMID's Civil Affairs section, sits with the King of El Fasher, Mr. Rmattalah Mahmoud, at a seminar on the role of civil society organizations in democratic systems at UNAMID headquarters. More than 100 participants, including representatives from academia, civil society, native administration, Government institutions and camps for displaced people, attended the event. Photo by Albert González Farran, UNAMID.





Nyala Evolves with Displacement, Development

As Sudan's second largest city and Darfur's largest metropolitan area, Nyala serves as an example of the challenges towns in this region are facing due to the ongoing conflict and the resulting strain on an already overburdened infrastructure.

BY MOHAMAD ALMAHADY

Darfur's decade-long conflict has led to massive population displacements and the formation of numerous camps for internally displaced persons (IDPs). The cycle of conflict and displacement not only creates a strain on existing resources and infrastructure, forcing many people to live without basic amenities, but also affects longstanding community ties as displaced populations inevitably have an impact on an area's local cultures and customs. IDP camps,

usually located in proximity to large towns, are transforming Darfur's social landscape and leading to the creation of newer and larger metropolitan zones.

A strong example of the effects of such changes is Nyala, the capital of South Darfur. An administrative hub since the early 20th century, Nyala emerged from the dark days of colonialism as a gateway for trade relations due to its airport and a railway line connecting the city directly to Sudan's fed-

eral capital, Khartoum. The division of Darfur into states in 1994 accorded Nyala the status of a capital city for the southern part of the region, elevating its importance even further. Following many years of quiet economic growth, Darfur's conflict and resulting population displacements altered Nyala's cultural and economic dimensions rapidly. With IDP camps cropping up on its periphery, and the presence of UNAMID, UN agencies and international nongov-



On 20 February 2014, Nyala's modern landscape reflects the rapid development and urbanization that has become the defining characteristic of the city. Nyala is now the second largest city in Sudan, after Khartoum, the federal capital. Different cultures and customs have meshed to create an evolving, dynamic socioeconomic environment. Photo by Hamid Abdulsalam, UNAMID.

“We plan to bring Nyala into the forefront among Sudanese towns, particularly in terms of modernizing the general appearance and organization of the city.”

—Essa Adam Abakar

keep pace with the demands placed upon it. “We plan to bring Nyala into the forefront among Sudanese towns, particularly in terms of modernizing the general appearance and organization of the city,” says Gen. Essa Adam Abakar, South Darfur Minister for Urban Planning and General Utilities.

Gen. Abakar explains that the South Darfur government’s agenda includes moving all industrial activity to the outskirts of the main city and providing essential services in peripheral localities to improve organization and reduce overcrowding. Additionally, he says, the government is taking steps to improve living conditions for IDPs by providing more education, water, security and healthcare services. The largest IDP camps in Nyala are Kalma in the southeast and Otash in the north. There are many other smaller camps near Nyala. These clusters of displaced people are straining Nyala’s existing resources. UNAMID, international NGOs and national organizations are playing an important role in buttressing the efforts of the South Darfur government to improve the lives of the displaced.

Following its mandate, UNAMID provides protection for civilians and security for the delivery of humanitarian aid, and is working closely with its local and international partners to move the peace process forward. The Mission has deployed formed police units (FPUs) in all IDP camps in and around Nyala; these units perform daily patrol and escort ser-

vices for the displaced. Furthermore, vocational training workshops and activities conducted by UNAMID’s Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) section in Nyala have enhanced people’s skills in livelihood activities, such as machine operations, welding, computer applications and mobile technology, thus increasing their vocational viability.

Such activities fall under the umbrella of UNAMID’s community-based, labour-intensive projects (CLIPs) programme. The CLIPs programme is designed to address several issues in Darfur, including competition over access to vocational training services. Since the commencement of the CLIPs programme in July 2012, UNAMID has implemented more than one dozen CLIPs throughout Darfur, engaging some 2,300 young 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.

Those working in the CLIPs projects are young men and women typically between 18 and 35 years old. The youth involved in these projects—which mostly consist of rebuilding community infrastructure that has been damaged or destroyed—acquire the kind of livelihood and life skills designed to enhance their employability and social integration. In the process of acquiring these skills, they work toward rebuilding the infrastructure of their fragile communities.

ernmental organizations (NGOs), Nyala has metamorphosed from a trading hub into a bustling, cosmopolitan city sprawling across the landscape.

According to the fifth Sudan Population and Housing Census conducted in 2008, more than 600,000 people live in Nyala, which is now the second largest city in Sudan, after Khartoum. With an influx of IDPs from across Darfur, different cultures and customs have meshed to create an evolving, dynamic socioeconomic environment that Dr. Mubarak Elshareef, a history professor at the University of Nyala, calls “one of Sudan’s most prosperous cities.”

The exponential growth of Nyala’s multicultural population has forced the government in South Darfur to focus on urban reform and civic planning to ensure that the city’s infrastructure can



“Nyala is one of the most developed commercial cities in Sudan due to a large population, developed living system, friendly relations with neighbouring counties, productive land and availability of agricultural and animal products.”

—Musa Abduazeem

In 2012, UNAMID’s DDR section partnered with Nyala Technical College (NTC) to implement several projects in the area. From 31 July 2012 to 30 November 2012, NTC managed a budget of approximately US\$100,000 to train 250 at-risk young people in vocational skills in 13 disciplines: metalwork, welding, plumbing, mechanics, automotive work, electrical work, sewing, food processing, computer operation and several other disciplines. The overall objective of the project was to empower at-risk young people and other vulnerable community members in developing alternative livelihood skills, from

the artisan level to the technical level. After completing the training, NTC worked with companies in the area to help find the newly trained students jobs.

UNAMID’s DDR section is now implementing more than one dozen additional CLIPs across Darfur, directly linking the projects to violence-reduction programmes. “Despite the absence of a comprehensive peace agreement, we are seeing real benefits of such projects, particularly as they help young people turn from violence and rebuild their communities,” says Mr. Aderemi Adekoya, Chief of UNAMID’s DDR section. “Without

recourse to proper vocational training—a fundamental problem these programmes are designed to address—many young people continue to be drawn into the Darfur conflict in one way or another.”

Supporting local communities through CLIPs and other empowerment-related programmes is only one of the many roles played by UNAMID and UN agency personnel working in and around Nyala. In addition to having a direct impact on communities in the area, one indirect side effect of the presence of international organizations in the area is the creation of job opportunities. Many Darfuris have found gainful employment in UNAMID, UN agencies and international NGOs, and are helping to support their families while working to address Nyala’s many pressing issues. As a result of the city’s evolving cosmopolitan demographic, investment in Nyala’s service industries has increased. Hotels, restaurants and shopping centres have sprung up. The real estate market has expanded.

As more and more people flock to Nyala, whether as IDPs seeking protec-



far left. On 23 February 2014, a UNAMID patrol moves through a remote area outside Nyala, South Darfur. Following its mandate, UNAMID provides protection for civilians and security for the delivery of humanitarian aid, and is working closely with its local and international partners to move the peace process forward. Photo by Hamid Abdulsalam, UNAMID.

top. On 23 February 2014, children are pictured near a UNAMID patrol on the outskirts of Nyala, South Darfur. In addition to conducting patrols to protect civilians, UNAMID has implemented several projects in Nyala to empower at-risk young people and other vulnerable community members with livelihood and life skills. Photo by Hamid Abdulsalam, UNAMID.

bottom. The venue for the IDP conference hosted by the Darfur Regional Authority in March 2013. At the conference, more than 400 IDPs from across Darfur came together to discuss pressing issues, including voluntary return and resettlement, as well as security. Photo by Hamid Abdulsalam, UNAMID.

tion or as foreign aid workers coming to help, trade with Nyala's neighbours has increased, nationally and internationally. In a strategic geographical location, Nyala serves as a key trade link with other towns in Darfur, with Khartoum and with neighbouring countries, such as Central African Republic and Chad.

Livestock, an important contributor to the Sudanese economy, is a sector where South Darfur excels. Cows, sheep, goats and camels are bred in Nyala for meat and leather, two of Sudan's leading export items to neighbouring countries. In addition, South Darfur is known for its fertile soil. It is one of the largest producers in Sudan of food and cash crops—ground nuts, sorghum, millet, sesame and watermelon seeds. Mangos, guavas, limes, oranges, bananas, grapefruit and apples are grown in South Darfur. A developed machine-irrigation infrastructure aids in the production of onions, potatoes, okra, tomatoes, watercress, radishes and carrots for local consumption. The Nyala agricultural market is one of the biggest in Sudan and

contributes significantly to the country's gross domestic product.

"Nyala is one of the most developed commercial cities in Sudan due to a large population, developed living system, friendly relations with neighbouring counties, productive land and availability of agricultural and animal products," says Mr. Musa Abduzeem, Chair of the South Darfur Chamber of Commerce. Mr. Abduzeem explains that, despite Nyala's dramatic expansion during the past decade and its status as a primary Sudanese trading hub, the ongoing conflict has posed a set of unique challenges to the city.

"Transport, security and taxes are the main issues faced by traders in south Darfur," he says. "Earlier, we used to wait for commercial convoys to arrive from Khartoum, but now, after the railways resumed operations, the situation has improved slightly in terms of transportation costs and the time factor."

Another challenge Nyala faces is education. In addition to focusing on infrastructure, commerce and industry expansion, South Darfur leaders are pay-

ing careful attention to Nyala's burgeoning population and its schooling needs. To transform the diverse demographic in Nyala, with its *mélange* of cultures, communities, ethnicities, interests and ideologies, into a productive human resources asset, the government in South Darfur has focused extensively on vocational training and higher education.

Nyala now has four universities with more than 10,000 students enrolled in various programmes. The largest higher-education institute, the University of Nyala, was established in 1994. The school not only offers a chance for Darfur's young intellectuals to work on their undergraduate and graduate degrees, but also plays a pivotal role in peace building and conflict resolution through its Peace Studies and Community Development Centre. The Centre's goal is to foster an environment of discussion and dialogue to further the cause of peace, a necessary prerequisite for economic and social development.

While Nyala is exhibiting rapid progress in many areas, it is still affected by occurrences of violence in and around



On 23 February 2014, trucks are loaded with goods for trade in Nyala, South Darfur. As more and more people flock to Nyala, trade with its neighbours has increased, nationally and internationally. In a strategic geographical location, Nyala serves as a key trade link with other towns in Darfur, with Khartoum and with neighbouring countries, such as Central African Republic and Chad. Photo by Hamid Abdulsalam, UNAMID.

the city. In March 2013, for example, 31 IDPs were captured during their journey to a two-day Nyala conference organized by the Darfur Regional Authority; the IDPs were later released. At the conference, more than 400 IDPs from across Darfur came together to discuss pressing issues, including voluntary return and resettlement, as well as security. The following month, fighting broke out between Government troops and an armed movement in Labado, 50 kilometres from Nyala. The hostilities decimated the area—the market, schools and the health care facilities were looted and destroyed—displacing nearly 30,000 people who fled to different IDP camps across South, East and North Darfur.

Aid workers, too, have gotten caught in the conflict. In July 2013, two aid workers were killed as fighting erupted in Nyala. Barely a week later, seven UNAMID peacekeepers were killed and 17 others injured in an ambush north of the city. This occurred 10 days after unidentified gunmen attacked a UNAMID patrol near Labado.

“While Nyala possesses most elements one would expect in a modern city, the overall lack of security and the unpredictable nature of violence in Darfur remains in the forefront of everyday existence.”

—Mubarak Elshareef

In November 2013, UNAMID Joint Special Representative Mohamed Ibn Chambas addressed more than 200 South Darfur tribal leaders who participated in a two-day conference to discuss the root causes of tribal conflict and recommend solutions for peaceful coexistence. The Head of UNAMID expressed his regrets with regard to the unfortunate deterioration of the security situation across Darfur. “Conflicts erupted between tribes that had coexisted peacefully for hundreds of years,” he said. “What is even more worrying has been the intensity of these conflicts and the excessively high number of casualties.”

The violence suffered by Darfuris continues to define the emotional, cultural and community life of Nyala. Conflict notwithstanding, Darfuris are realistic about the situation but remain hopeful that peace will come soon. “While Nyala possesses most elements one would expect in a modern city, the overall lack of security and the unpredictable nature of violence in Darfur remains in the forefront of everyday existence,” says Dr. Elshareef. “However, if sustainable peace were to be achieved in Sudan, then Nyala, without a doubt, would be one of the greatest cities in the country.”

Attitudes Shift on Female Circumcision

The global campaign to identify female circumcision as female genital mutilation, a practice common in many parts of the world, is resulting in a slow but steady change in Darfur.

BY EMADELDIN RIJAL



Many Darfuri girls are circumcised before the onset of puberty, leading to severe health complications. These issues have led to efforts at the national and international levels to eradicate genital cutting in Darfur. The Saleema national campaign to fight female genital mutilation was set into motion in 2008 across Sudan to sensitize people to the consequences of the practice and ensure that future generations can enjoy the advantages of being Saleema, meaning “whole” and “intact” in Arabic. Photo by Albert González Farran, UNAMID.

The communities that practice female circumcision in Darfur are, in most cases, motivated by cultural precedent; the practice is typically done as part of a coming-of-age ceremony. In some cases, community elders justify it with religion, although most of Darfur’s established religious leaders eschew the belief that female circumcision is necessary. Among the communities here, female circumcision continues to be a topic of debate. Those who support the practice say circumcised women are less likely to commit adultery because circumcision mitigates female libido. This belief unfortunately leads to uncircumcised women having fewer chances for marriage. For many Darfuri families, therefore, female circumcision is not uncommon.

As part of the female circumcision ceremony, relatives, neighbours and friends are invited to a grand feast. The circumcision itself, which is usually held in the morning, is followed by merry-making and festivities that continue well into the evening. Ceremonial drums are played, and the circumcised girl receives gifts, such as gold ornaments, money and livestock. A bigger feast is held on the seventh day after the main event to signal the end of the festivities. In Darfur, the circumcision itself is typically performed by midwives, who are provided with money and household items, such as sugar, coffee and tea, as tokens of appreciation for performing the operation.

The girls who undergo this operation—usually around the age of seven—

exhibit a sense of pride that typically fuels curiosity among their peers who have yet to be circumcised. Because this practice is usually done before the onset of puberty, the girls are not fully aware of the health hazards they face. Indeed, in many cases, it is possible that all those attending the circumcision ceremony are unaware of the near-catastrophic physiological and psychological effects that can result from female circumcision.

“I will never forget the time I underwent this procedure, particularly the fact that I was desperately trying to resist it,” says Muna, who used the word “agony” to describe the pain she experienced as she recalls how her mother and her female relatives, along with the midwife, held her down for the operation. “It was



On 21 October 2013, a woman shares her views during a workshop on female circumcision in the Abu Shouk camp for displaced people in El Fasher, North Darfur. The workshop, organized by UNAMID and nongovernmental organization Tigo to commemorate Africa Human Rights Day, was held under the theme “Abolishing Female Genital Mutilation Now.” Photo by Hamid Abdulsalam, UNAMID.

a bad moment that continued to have serious consequences in my life,” she says, explaining that, as a result of the procedure, she has had to undergo two cesarean sections while giving birth. The need to have C-sections is a complication associated with female circumcision.

The World Health Organization defines female circumcision as female genital mutilation: “all procedures that involve partial or total removal of the external female genitalia or other injury to the female genital organs, whether for cultural or other non-therapeutic reasons.” Medical experts have identified the negative effects of genital cutting as urinary tract infections, haemorrhaging, urine retention, abscesses, obstetrical complications and sexual dysfunction.

Mr. Ahmed Taha Al-Zaki, a reproductive health expert and head of the Al Kwakibi Centre for Health and Community Development in El Fasher, North Darfur, says conditions such as urinary fistula and obstetrical complications are a direct consequence of circumcision. “If we are to free our society from these complications, then we need to have all members of the community sensitized to the issue,” he says.

With growing awareness regarding the dangers of genital cutting, there have been concentrated efforts from the Darfur’s medical community, national

“There is a change in the perspective of the local communities on female genital mutilation, particularly among those who have been sensitized.”

—Nafisa Mohammed

and international nongovernmental organizations and the United Nations to raise awareness about the dangers of this practice. “Female circumcision adversely affects the health of the young girls who undergo this often painful procedure,” says Ms. Magda Ibrahim, a UNAMID Gender Officer.

In its efforts to help eradicate female genital mutilation in Darfur, UNAMID, along with its partners, has been conducting workshops for community members, including midwives and religious leaders. According to Ms. Nafisa Mohammed, a North Darfur gender activist, these sessions have helped many families make the decision not to circumcise their daughters. “There is a change in the perspective of the local communities on female genital mutilation, particularly among those who have been sensitized,” says Ms. Mohammed.

Mission personnel have conducted many such education sessions in Darfur as part of global information campaigns and during key global occasions, such as

the annual series of events called “Sixteen Days of Activism against Gender Violence.” In addition, UNAMID has conducted training sessions for members of the Darfuri media on the risks associated with female circumcision. And in collaboration with the Sudanese Ministries of Health, the Mission’s personnel have been working to support new laws and regulations designed to prevent and discourage female circumcision.

“From the legal point of view, we consider female genital mutilation as a form of gender-based violence and violence against children,” says Mr. Mohammed Salim, a North Darfur lawyer who explains that, while the risks associated with female circumcision might be well known, the Sudan Criminal Act does not contain provisions that expressly forbid the practice. He points out that the Sudan Child Law of 2004 initially contained a stipulation criminalizing the practice of genital cutting, but it was revoked following an amendment influenced by a parliamentary lobby.



Ms. Nafisa Mohammed, a North Darfur gender activist, says she believes that the workshops conducted by UNAMID have been instrumental in convincing many families not to circumcise their daughters. Photo by Albert Gonzalez Farran, UNAMID.

Mr. Salim says he believes that because Sudan is a signatory to international conventions and charters related to child protection, the safeguards contained within such charters should be embodied in Sudan's Constitution. "Apart from scientific proof regarding the health risks caused by female genital mutilation, the practice of female circumcision legally represents an abuse against children," he says.

The Secretary General of the North Darfur Council for Child Welfare (NDCCW), Ms. Khadija Abdulmageed, explains that a bill already has been introduced to bolster efforts to prevent the practice of genital cutting. According to Ms. Abdulmageed, the proposed bill, which North Darfur authorities are working to pass, is in its preliminary stage. She says that, while monitoring and follow-up mechanisms established under NDCCW indicate that there is an overall decrease in the practice in Darfur, rural areas remain a challenge. "Darfur is one of main regions in Sudan where female circumcision has been practiced far and wide," she explains. "The difficulty of reaching out to remote areas presents a major challenge for the implementation of programs created to eradicate female genital mutilation."

While many people in Sudan, and especially in Darfur, cite social rather

than religious reasons as a basis to support female circumcision, proponents of the practice typically take issue with the manner in which circumcision is conducted rather than objecting to the practice itself. According to the Sudan Household Health Survey of 2010, which at the time also included data from what is now South Sudan, the percentage of girls and women who have undergone any form of genital cutting is 65.5. The most damaging sort of female circumcision involves the removal of the labia minora, labia majora and the clitoris, leaving only a narrow gap for the passing of urine or menstrual blood; this practice has decreased among Darfuri communities, particularly among those living in urban areas.

"The habit of practicing female circumcision is declining gradually," says Mr. Abdulaziz Haroun, Chair of the Al-Toweisha Locality Network for Combating Harmful Practices. The Al-Toweisha Network, one of many groups established in Darfur localities under the aegis of the NDCCW, is working to accelerate efforts to eliminate the practice altogether. Such networks typically consist of medical doctors, midwives, nurses, social workers, community leaders and media practitioners.

Members in these networks undergo training sessions provided jointly by the

Council for Child Welfare and the Ministry of Health. As part of their commitment to eradicate genital cutting, all members sign a pledge that they will discourage the practice of female circumcision in their communities. Although Darfur's midwives—especially those who have received no formal training—are well known for their role in the practice, those joining one of these networks pledge not to support it or promote it; those who continue to participate in the ceremonies after making this pledge are heavily fined.

Even with a growing number of such networks across Darfur, some families insist on circumcising their daughters. Such families, which often live in rural areas, represent one of the main challenges to the eradication of female genital mutilation. "I was hesitant about the new trend against female circumcision," says Shadia, a mother of two girls who are not circumcised but whose future status with regard to circumcision remains uncertain. Shadia says it is difficult to accept that female circumcision is something of the past.

Taking the opposite position is Fathyia, a 40-year-old mother, says she will not allow her daughters to undergo the procedure because she is concerned with the health implications. "None of my daughters will be circumcised," she says, conceding that even though she is against the practice, most families in her community will have their daughters circumcised.

"I am not going to allow this practice to happen to my daughters," says Hussein, a father of two, insisting that he will block any move to have his girls circumcised. "Our sisters, mothers and grandmothers have suffered from the ordeal of being circumcised," he says, explaining that the practice will not take place in his house because he values the health of his daughters above all other considerations.

To consolidate support against the mutilation of prepubescent girls in Darfur, the NDCCW, in its capacity as an official body concerned with affairs related to children, is reaching out to these communities in rural areas, camps for internally displaced people and other places where the practice of



In Darfur, it is customary for midwives to perform female circumcision. However, an increasing number of midwives, such as those pictured here, are joining local organizations that are raising awareness about the negative physiological and psychological side effects of the practice, and are pledging not to perform the operations. Photo by Albert González Farran, UNAMID.

“From the legal point of view, we consider female genital mutilation as a form of gender-based violence and violence against children.”

—Mohammed Salim

circumcising young girls is prevalent. Continuing to build local networks and intensifying media campaigns are two strategies adopted by the NDCCW to fight genital cutting.

The largest of such media campaigns is the Saleema national campaign to end female genital mutilation; the initiative, set into motion in 2008 across Sudan, is designed to sensitize people to the consequences of this practice, help those who have been affected by it and ensure that future generations can enjoy the advantages of being saleema, meaning “whole” and “intact” in Arabic. The

Saleema campaign, which established a target date of 2018 to eliminate the practice in Sudan completely, has gained wide acceptance nationally and internationally.

United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, in a 2014 message delivered on the International Day of Zero Tolerance for Female Genital Mutilation, called attention to the Saleema campaign and said it is leading to real social change in Sudan. He pointed out that hundreds of Sudanese communities have embraced the initiative and that other countries are emulating Saleema or coming up with similar ideas tailored to their local

customs, such as in Kenya, where the Meru community elders have prohibited genital cutting and are imposing fines on anyone associated with the practice.

Members of the Saleema campaign, which include health workers and medical professionals, have been using the media and other direct-contact approaches, such as workshops, symposia, theatrical shows and debates to propagate their messages. While working to convey messages directly to their audiences, the campaigners appear dressed in brightly coloured scarves as they draw attention to the issue of genital cutting and work at the local level to cultivate a better understanding of its risks. In Darfur, the impact of the campaign is reflected in changing attitudes, particularly in urban areas. “Increasingly, people are talking about the advantages that can be connected to the lack of circumcision,”



On 11 March 2013 in North Darfur, students of the El Fasher Midwifery School participate in a march organized by UNAMID to commemorate International Women's Day. The event was held under the theme "Together to Promote the Dignity of Women and Girls." One of the challenges faced by Darfuri women is female circumcision, a practice that leads to severe health complications. Photo by Albert González Farran, UNAMID.

says Ms. Abdulmageed. "In fact, there are some communities influenced by the civilization in towns, and are moving toward completely discarding the practice."

Intervening in this sensitive issue is now a concern for almost every member of Darfuri society. "One of the best ways to address the issue of female circumcision is through the involvement of all relevant actors, including social welfare institutions and organizations, the Ministry of Health, religious bodies and those dealing with psychosocial health," states Mr. Al-Zaki.

In Darfur, community leaders and health workers say the ongoing efforts to deal with female circumcision are contributing to hope that future generations will not be subjected to this practice. These efforts, in Darfur and abroad, are being undertaken in ways that can raise awareness about this sensitive issue with-

"The United Nations and our partners are engaged in valuable, culturally sensitive activities that aim to stop female genital mutilation without scolding or shame."

—Ban Ki-moon

out upsetting deeply held beliefs. "The United Nations and our partners are engaged in valuable, culturally sensitive activities that aim to stop female genital mutilation without scolding or shame," says Mr. Ban. "The effect on individuals will be profound, sparing them pain and spurring their success."

In his message for this year's International Day of Zero Tolerance for Female Genital Mutilation, which was observed around the world in February under the theme "Preserve the Best in

Culture and Leave Harm Behind," the Secretary-General said that the benefits of ending the practice will reverberate across society as these girls will thrive and contribute to a better future for all. "Fortunately, there are positive signs of progress in our global push to end this harmful practice," the Secretary-General said. "It is encouraging that an increasing number of communities are coming together and agreeing publicly to end female genital mutilation and ensure a better life for their girls." ❖

Darfur's Struggle for Water

As competition over Darfur's natural water resources is one of the major drivers of the decade-long conflict here, UNAMID and its partners have been working to address this issue.

BY ALBERT GONZÁLEZ FARRAN

Darfur's rains usually fall between the months of June and September, replenishing the dry river valleys and lakebeds across the region. However, this bounty is short-lived; the rest of the year is almost completely devoid of rainfall, obligating those living here to store enough water to irrigate their lands, support their animals and meet the needs of their families through the dry seasons. Doing so is not an easy feat in such a dry climate, and requires innovative methods to counter the crippling lack of this precious resource.

In North Darfur, the driest state in the region, the climate has made farming difficult in recent years. As a result, many people have abandoned agricultural activities to seek better opportunities in urban areas or in nearby camps for internally displaced persons (IDPs). The welfare of IDPs, of prime importance to redevelopment activities in Darfur, is deeply connected to the water situation here, with water serving as a basic foundation upon which communities are able to sustain livelihood activities.

The scarcity of water in North Darfur is acutely felt in the numerous camps for IDPs that are spread across the Darfuri landscape and grouped near urban areas. In many of these camps, water is available only for a few hours each day; peaceful mornings in the camps are sometimes punctuated by loud arguments about equitably allocating this valuable supply among the throngs of women and children gathered at designated water points. As a result of the shortage, many people are forced to return to their shelters with empty jerry cans.

The Golo dam in North Darfur, on the outskirts of El Fasher, is one example of the infrastructure rehabilitation that this region requires to sustain the increasing populations near urban areas. The dam's current capacity of 1 million cubic metres provides drinking water for the city of El Fasher. However, over the years, this reservoir has lost nearly 80 per cent of its capacity due to ero-

sion and silt deposits. Effective and sustainable improvements to the dam are expected, and other similar rehabilitation projects are planned.

Like those organisations working on the Golo dam, others—including UNAMID, UN agencies and Sudanese institutions—are implementing projects designed to improve water conditions for the people inhabiting Darfur's villages in rural areas. For example, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and local partner Practical Action have been working to assess a 50-kilometre stretch of the El Ku catchment in Shagra, North Darfur, with the goal of investing USD\$7 million in European Union funds to help manage the natural resources in the area. This project correlates livelihood activities to natural-resource management programmes and is combining traditional water-management techniques with newer methods.

In addition to catching rainwater in barrels or hollowed-out trees, wells are one of the most common ways that people across the region are meeting their water needs. Many of these wells, which tap into Darfur's underground water reserves, are located inside wadis, the seasonal river valleys that remain dry except during the rainy season. The wadi wells enable nearby communities to provide water for their families during the entire year. People collect water from these wells manually; machine-powered wells are not common in Darfur. Other water-storage and conservation programmes include dams, forests and new irrigation methods.

Competition over the control and use of Darfur's natural resources is one of the major drivers of the decade-long conflict here. UNAMID and its partners have been working to address the shortage of water in the interest of promoting peace and peaceful coexistence. Even so, as this photo essay is designed to illustrate, the hardships faced by the Darfuri population during the unrelenting dry season are severe. ■

1 A farmer, a leader of the local community in Madjoub, North Darfur, inspects a damaged dam in his locality. The villagers managed to store some rainwater, but it was not enough to carry them through the dry season; the lack of water makes it impossible for farmers to cultivate crops.

2 A leader of the local farming community in Madjoub inspects the effects of a damaged dam in the locality. To ensure the availability of water in rural areas, the United Nations Environment Programme is working to help farmers in Madjoub with new resource-management methods.

3 A farmer from Madjoub inspects a community forestry project in which local farmers are growing different species of trees using minimal water. Several water projects, such as constructing dams, planting forests and using water-saving irrigation techniques, are underway across Darfur.









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4 Women and children from Shagra, North Darfur, collect water from a well located in El Ku. This wadi, or seasonal river valley, runs with water only during the rainy season, and is currently dry. However, the wadi's wells store reserves of rainwater for nearby communities to use during the dry seasons.

5 A child from Shagra, North Darfur, collects water from a well in El Ku. The United Nations Environment Programme and partner Practical Action are assessing the needs of this 50-kilometre stretch of the wadi catchment area to help implement better management of natural resources.

6 Water trickles from a tap in a water point in the Nifasha camp for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in North Darfur. The IDPs, mostly women and children, have access to water for two hours each morning and suffer from a serious lack of this precious resource.

7 A woman waters seedlings in a greenhouse constructed by the World Food Programme in Majdoub, North Darfur. The objective of the project is to promote community forestry and support Darfuris living in rural areas with sustainable and environmentally friendly livelihood options.

8 Farmers and community leaders in Shagra, North Darfur, observe a rain gauge installed at one of the community forestry projects they have implemented near their village. During the rainy season, they check this device each day to calculate the amount of rain that has fallen on their land.

9 The Golo reservoir, near El Fasher, North Darfur, is used as a source of water for the entire El Fasher area. The reservoir has lost 80 per cent of its actual capacity due to silting and erosion, but is in the process of being rehabilitated.



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Harmonizing Darfur: An Interview with Omar Ihsas

In an interview with *Voices of Darfur*, Mr. Omar Ihsas spoke about his career, the challenges he has faced and his belief in the pivotal role that music plays in the Darfur peace process.

BY ALA MAYYAH



On 2 December 2013, renowned Darfuri singer, Mr. Omar Ihsas, poses before a performance at a club in Khartoum, Sudan. Mr. Ihsas, who says music can be an effective tool for social change, promotes the message of peace in Darfur through his compositions. Photo by Albert González Farran, UNAMID.

Born in 1958 in Nyala, South Darfur, Mr. Omar Ahmed Mustafa, one of Darfur's most renowned singers, moved to Khartoum at age 23 to study music at Sudan's High Institute for Music and Drama. He first developed a reputation as a singer during an audition for the South Khartoum Club for Music and Arts, where he sang one of his own compositions. The song, called *Ihsas* (meaning "feeling" in Arabic), eventually resulted in his chosen stage name.

Mr. Ihsas' coupling of local beats and melodies with lyrics about peace helped paved the way to a national following

in Sudan and international success in the United Kingdom, China, the United States and Canada. Now a well-known international celebrity, Mr. Ihsas says he remains dedicated to Darfur and its struggle for peace. His songs reflect the challenges faced by Darfuris; his concerts, held in cities as well as remote camps for internally displaced people, reverberate with nostalgia for a bygone era when people in this conflict-torn region lived in harmony.

In an interview with *Voices of Darfur*, Mr. Ihsas spoke about his career, the challenges he has faced and his beliefs in the pivotal role that music plays in the Darfur peace process.

Voices of Darfur: How were the initial years of your career in Khartoum? Did you face a great deal of competition in Khartoum because it is the hub of artistic activity in Sudan?

Ihsas: I started my career in music in my late teens, and success did not come easy, especially given the high goals I set for myself. Actually, the challenges I faced started in Darfur, and then in Khartoum. I also faced challenges when I began using Darfuri rhythms, which were resisted by some media institutions, and when I started performing abroad. But with

persistence, faith and hope, I've been able to move forward.

VoD: Now that you've gained popularity as a singer, does it make your work easier?

Ihsas: Well, my work is more difficult now because maintaining success is the hardest part; it requires dedicated effort and time, whether for composing songs, writing lyrics or performing concerts. These challenges are in addition to other challenges we're all facing as Sudanese artists today.

VoD: Tell us a bit about these other challenges you're facing.

Ihsas: They're related to the difficult situation the country is going through in general, such as the economic crises and the security issues. These are global challenges, and they're affecting people's lives one way or another. As artists, it's become costly to participate in activities abroad, largely because the festivals' sponsors are no longer paying for travel costs, which have risen in recent years. The artists, or his or her country, must now bear these costs.

Internally, no large festivals are being held any longer because of the austerity measures. All this adds pressure on the artist. Even TV and radio stations stopped funding songs because they can't afford to pay the artists, including the lyrics writers and the composers. Security-wise, we're not able to perform in some areas in Darfur or South Kordofan. So these economic and security challenges add pressure to today's artists. Artists of older generations didn't have to face these challenges.

VoD: Starting out, were you inspired by any specific singers or musicians?

Ihsas: Yes, in my travels to various areas in Sudan, I was inspired by some singers, such as Zedan Ibrahim, Abu Arky Al Bakhit and Al Kabily. Then, after I started composing songs, I got inspired by Bob Marley because of the way he used the bass guitar, which is a primary instrument for boosting the beat. So I learned how to play the bass to use it in my music, because the beat is key in my songs. So it was important to me to be

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able to use the bass effectively. Also, during my studies in Khartoum, I had the opportunity to meet and interact with some good musicians who were another source of inspiration and contributed to my music education in general.

VoD: Can we say that Khartoum was the main place for Darfuri musicians to learn music? And how did Darfuri songs evolve over the years with the influence of Arabic and African music?

Ihsas: In my generation, only Khartoum and Juba had academic institutions for music. But if we want to talk about the earlier years, in the 1950s, a few Darfuris learned how to play the lute from some governmental employees who visited Darfur and happened to play that instrument. Those Darfuris used to sing in simple tunes while playing the lute. In the 1960s, other musical instruments, such as the violin and the bongos, were used to accompany Darfuri songs. It's worth mentioning here that in that period there were some famous musicians, such as Abdul Hameed Al Shenqity, from El Fasher, who died just a few months ago, and the artist Abdu Kiwoka, from Zalingei, who used to sing and play music, and now lives in Khartoum.

Afterward, Darfuri songs started evolving, influenced by Khartoum artists, and gradually started forming their own character in terms of melody, beat and even lyrics, as some non-Arabic tribes started singing in their own languages. Today, the Darfuri music identity reflects both Arabic and African styles. Some Darfuri tunes are affected by Arabic melodies, but all our rhythms are African. For example, some tribes in the Baggara area make a unique type of maqamat music. Maqamat is a typical Arabic type of music, but the Baggara tribes add African

beats to this style. The African beat is a common element in our music.

VoD: You have lived in Khartoum for many years and you travel extensively. Has staying away from Darfur weakened your emotional connections to the land of your birth?

Ihsas: Geographical distance has never affected my ties to Darfur. Nor has my busy schedule ever detracted from my commitment to promoting peace in the region. One of my favorite songs includes the words “Dignity is their symbol...carried home on their chests.” I wrote the lyrics with the Darfuri people in mind.

VoD: You've performed in concerts organized by UNAMID to promote peace in Darfur. Have you promoted peace in other concerts? And how do you see young people accepting these songs?

Ihsas: I promote peace constantly, in all my concerts. People who come to my concerts, especially young people, highly appreciate these peace songs. By the way, peace songs require lots of effort because they need exciting tunes and lively beats, along with moving lyrics and elevating performances, to convey the messages effectively to the audience.

VoD: In 2011, you produced and performed a song at the opening of a conference to address Darfur's water issues. Large funds were pledged by some participants, and yet the people of Darfur still suffer because of water scarcity. Does this discourage you from performing for similar events?

Ihsas: Of course it disappoints me to see people still suffering from issues related to water. There were high hopes that the conference would help improve the situation and speed up solutions with regard to water. However, this hasn't discouraged me from performing songs

that support improving the lives of Darfuris, whether in similar conferences or on other occasions.

VoD: Some believe that the Doha Document for Peace in Darfur (DDPD) can really achieve peace if signed by all parties. Do you agree?

Ihsas: Yes. I think the DDPD is a serious step toward achieving peace in Darfur, that is, if all stakeholders take it seriously. A focused implementation of its provisions can encourage all non-signatory armed movements to sign the document.

VoD: Do you think that new songs based on key elements of the DDPD, such as peace, internal dialogue, justice and human rights could be written? Could such songs play a role in encouraging non-signatories to join the peace process?

Ihsas: This is a definite possibility. Such songs could be circulated widely on various media, such as cassette tapes and CDs, as well as via television and radio channels. I recall how, in one of my meetings with Dr. Eltigani Seisi, Chair of the Darfur Regional Authority, we talked about how important it is to perform such songs prior to conferences and workshops on issues related to the DDPD, reconciliation and peace. Such songs motivate people positively and open up their minds to relevant issues.

VoD: Women's rights, social justice or renouncing violence—which issue would you promote in a song?

Ihsas: Although I am a firm advocate for women's rights, I would choose to sing about renouncing violence because it is inextricably related to the other issues. If everyone rejects violence, women will be in a better position with regard to their rights; also, it will become easier to achieve social justice. Peace dictates respect for each other's rights, whether man or woman.

VoD: Would you say that songs in Darfur have more impact than other types of art, such as theatre and poetry, or are they equally effective?

Ihsas: Each form of art has its own importance, but a song can be more effective because of the ease with which it captures the popular imagination and gets disseminated. Moreover, music can relate to other forms of artistic expression. For



Noted Darfuri singer, Mr. Omar Ihsas, interacts with fellow musicians at a 2 December 2013 performance in Khartoum, Sudan. Mr. Ihsas' songs encourage the youth of Darfur to participate in the peace process. Photo by Albert González Farran, UNAMID.

“One of my favorite songs includes the words ‘Dignity is their symbol...carried home on their chests.’ I wrote the lyrics with the Darfuri people in mind.”

example, a song can be part of a play, and a poem can be set to a tune. In general, both poetry and theatre are important because these art forms resonate with the people of Darfur, especially if they are presented in a language they understand.

We have a history of traditional proverbs, considered the most effective literary form in Darfur. A short proverb consisting of two simple parts can actually be instrumental in resolving a dispute between two tribes if used at the right time within a reconciliation gathering, such as in a *Ju-djya* session [one of Darfur's traditional justice mechanisms for working out legal disputes in a civil forum].

VoD: Some experts say music makes people feel better about them themselves. Do you think music really has the power to alleviate aggressiveness or a tendency toward violence?

Ihsas: Music undoubtedly can elicit an emotional response in people. It has been used as part of psychological treatment to treat mental disorders. Some marriage counselors advise married couples to listen to music and learn the salsa because such activities have a positive impact on stress and enable couples to reconnect. Also, playing, singing or listening

to music elevates one's mood. Music is a great stress-relief tool; this is why most musicians look younger than their age.

VoD: What do you miss the most about the years you spent in Nyala?

Ihsas: I miss the evenings when my friends and I would gather with others from different tribes. Members of each tribe would sing and perform traditional dances. There was complete harmony, a naturally friendly atmosphere that reflected the highest degree of social peace. As advocates of peace, this is what all of us seek today.

VoD: What message would you like give to the Darfuri youth?

Ihsas: I believe that the youth of Darfur are the ones responsible for the region's future. So let us prove to our elders that we can coexist despite our differences. Let us show the world that we are capable of establishing peace. Also, I would like to exhort Darfuris living in Khartoum to establish cultural and social associations through which we can work to strengthen ties between tribes and seek solutions for internal disputes in Darfur. We constitute the intellectual Darfuri community in the capital and we must play a positive role in Darfur's future. ■




On 2 December 2013 in Khartoum, Sudan, singer and composer Mr. Omar Ihsas performs during a music concert. Mr. Ihsas' songs deliver messages of reconciliation and encourage the youth of Darfur to participate in the peace process. Photo by Albert González Farran, UNAMID.




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