

UNAMID's publication for the people of Darfur

VOICES

of Darfur

JANUARY 2013

Darfur's Many Colours

**An Interview with Buhery
Mohamed Youssef**

**A New Sense of Solidarity
in East Darfur**

*Resolving disputes the
traditional way*

**The Girls Who Become
Brides**

*No choice in education or
vocation*

**Force Commander on
Darfur's Blue Helmets**

*The many challenges of
protecting civilians*



AFRICAN UNION - UNITED NATIONS
MISSION IN DARFUR
(UNAMID)



A painting created by El Geneina artist Buhery Mohammed Youssef, whose art focuses mostly on nature and local traditions.

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EDITOR'S NOTE

I'm pleased to introduce the January issue of *Voices of Darfur*, which continues in the 32-page format, giving the magazine the ability to tell the story of UNAMID and the people of Darfur with more in-depth coverage. The current issue, like other recent issues of *Voices*, contains news, features and interviews not only about unique aspects of life in Darfur but also about UNAMID's ongoing efforts to facilitate lasting peace in the region.

This issue includes two interviews, first an exclusive with UNAMID's Force Commander, conducted by Ms. Rania Abdulrahman at UNAMID headquarters in El Fasher, North Darfur. In the interview, Lt. Gen. Patrick Nyamvumba talks about the goals and challenges of UNAMID's peacekeepers in protecting civilians in Darfur. Ms. Ala Mayyahi conducted the second interview, our cover feature, with artist Buhery Youssef. In the interview, Mr. Youssef talks with *Voices* about the artist's role in Darfur, and shares his thoughts on the impact of visual arts on the peace process.

In the viewpoint published in this issue, Mr. Aderemi Adekoya, the Chief of UNAMID's Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) Section, offers his thoughts about the challenges related to DDR work in Darfur, especially considering that there is no comprehensive peace agreement signed by all the armed movements. Mr. Adekoya presents the case that it's long overdue for combatants to lay down their arms and embrace the future of Darfur.

In "A New Sense of Solidarity in East Darfur," Mr. Albert González Farran offers a look at the complexities of one of Darfur's newest states, which has been home to tribal clashes in recent years. While peaceful coexistence between the many tribes living in the area might seem to be an unattainable goal, the camps for displaced people in El Daein are serving as models of what is possible when different agendas lead to dialogue and peaceful negotiation.

In "The Girls Who Become Brides," Ms. Sharon Lukunka writes about forced marriage with girls under the age of 18, a practice that is common in some rural areas of Darfur despite many outspoken Darfuri advocates working to highlight the implications and risks associated with it. Statistics indicate that the annual rate in the number of child marriages is increasing globally, and will rise to 14.2 million per year by 2020 if measures are not taken to curb the current trend.

In "Malha: Homeland of the Midobs," Mr. Abdullahi Shuaibu offers a look at a serene and mountainous North Darfur locality inhabited by Sudan's Midob tribe. Finally, in "Charting Progress on the Role of Women," Mr. Emadeldin Rijal writes about the concerted global momentum to address women's rights in conflict situations, and explains how, despite some setbacks, Darfur is making progress on women's issues.

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



Artist Buhery Mohammed Youssef shows a painting in his studio in El Geneina, West Darfur. Portrait by Albert González Farran.



On 17 December 2012 in Maatba, North Darfur, a girl participates in the inauguration ceremony of a health centre built with the assistance of UNAMID. Photo by Sojoud Elgarrai.

Acting UNAMID Head: Cooperation Key in Protecting Civilians

BY RANIA ABDULRAHMAN



On 10 December 2012, in El Daein, East Darfur, UNAMID Acting Head Aichatou Mindaoudou meets with government officials, native administration and community leaders. Photo by Rania Abdulrahman.

Protection of civilians, security of personnel, the peace process and development projects were among the topics discussed during a two-day visit to East and South Darfur by UNAMID Acting Joint Special Representative (JSR) and Joint Chief Mediator *a.i.* Aichatou Mindaoudou. The visit,

which began on 10 December and concluded the following day, provided the Acting JSR with the opportunity to engage community leaders, native administration and government officials to explore new avenues for strengthening partnerships at the operational level.

In El Daein, the capital of

East Darfur, the UNAMID Acting Head held talks with the Deputy *Wali* (Governor) Abdulmajeed El Zaier to discuss the implementation of the Doha Document for Peace in Darfur, UNAMID's framework for the protection of civilians and the Mission's efforts to support local mediation initiatives.

"The Cooperation with Government authorities and the community is instrumental to the successful implementation of UNAMID's protection of civilians strategy, particularly on access, preventive measures and rapid response," Ms. Mindaoudou said during the meeting with the Deputy *Wali*.

Also in El Daein, the Acting JSR attended a ceremony, held at Um-Durman University, to mark the UN's annual campaign of 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence. Ms. Mindaoudou addressed the

women who took part in the event. "This campaign recalls our shared responsibility to identify community strategies and work together for the advancement of women's human rights, particularly their right to be heard and to shape decisions that affect their lives and the communities they live in," she said.

In Nyala, the AJSR met with South Darfur *Wali* Hamad Ismail Hamad to discuss issues of access to all parts of Darfur, the safety and security of UNAMID personnel and the cooperation between the State and UNAMID in implementing the Mission's protection strategy.

In November 2012, Ms. Mindaoudou made similar visits to West, Central and North Darfur, in an effort to engage Darfur stakeholders in protecting civilians and promoting the peace process. ■

Mohamed Ibn Chambas Appointed as New UNAMID Head



On 20 December 2012, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon (right) and AU Commission Chairperson Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma announce the appointment of Mr. Mohamed Ibn Chambas (left) of Ghana as their UNAMID Joint Special Representative and African Union-United Nations Joint Chief Mediator. Photo by Eskinder Debebe, UN Photo.

On 20 December, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and African Union Commission Chairperson Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma announced the appointment of Mr. Mohamed Ibn Chambas of Ghana as their UNAMID Joint Special Representative and African Union-United Nations Joint Chief Mediator.

Mr. Chambas replaces Mr. Ibrahim Gambari of Nigeria. In a statement, the Secretary-General and the African Union Commission Chairperson reiterated their deep appreciation to Mr. Gambari for his dedicated service during his tenure with UNAMID.

Mr. Chambas brings to the position a career in both international and governmental fora, most recently serving as the Secretary General of the African,

Caribbean, Pacific Group of States. Prior to this, Mr. Chambas was the President of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) from 2006 to 2009 and the Executive Secretary of ECOWAS from 2002 to 2005.

Mr. Chambas was a Member of Parliament and served in 1987 as Deputy Foreign Secretary of Ghana. He also served as the Deputy Minister of Education in charge of Tertiary Education from 1997 to 2000. Prior to that, he was involved in the mediation efforts in Liberia, between 1991 and 1996.

Born in Ghana in 1950, Mr. Chambas holds a Bachelor's in Political Science from the University of Ghana, a Master's and PhD from Cornell University and a law degree from Case Western Reserve University. ■

UNAMID Lends Resources to Fighting Yellow Fever in Darfur

BY CHRIS CYCMANICK



On 14 November 2012, in El Geneina, West Darfur, Mr. Saleh Mohamed Hamid receives medical attention at the Teaching Hospital in El Geneina after contracting Yellow Fever. Photo by Albert González Farran.

In November and December 2012, to help combat the spread of yellow fever in Darfur, UNAMID provided critical logistics support to the Sudanese Ministry of Health and the World Health Organization

(WHO). The urgency to address the disease, which broke out in September, came in late October following a spike in the number of those cases identified in Central Darfur and in the region's other states.

As a result of the outbreak, 2.4 million doses of yellow fever vaccine were made available to Sudan by the International Coordination Group on Vaccines, which controls the global stock of vaccines. UNAMID airlifted the first batches from Khartoum to Darfur on 18 November. The Government of Sudan brought additional batches shortly thereafter. UNAMID also airlifted several hundred tons of injection materials and other items from Darfur State capitals to localities.

With the medication in place and facilities ready to administer it, vaccination campaigns began in West Darfur on 20 November, in North Darfur on 24 November and in Central and South Darfur

on 25 November. The Mission's assistance included security escorts, technical services and medical expertise, as well as the use of assets such as generators for rural medical facilities and isolation tents.

In addition, UNAMID arranged for the transportation of large quantities of insecticide for use in camps for internally displaced people in the Central Darfur town of Zalingei.

"We are here to help the people of Darfur," said UNAMID Acting Joint Special Representative and Joint Chief Mediator *a.i.* Aichatou Mindaoudou. "By working together with our humanitarian partners and the Ministry of Health, we are able to save lives." ■

Zamzam, North Darfur



On 6 December 2012, girls in the Zamzam camp for internally displaced people in North Darfur perform traditional Darfuri dances and songs at an event to commemorate the UN's 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence. UNAMID organized several similar activities throughout Darfur to draw attention to women's rights. Photo by Albert González Farran.

Darfur Peace Parties Meet with UNAMID, AU Leadership

BY CHRIS CYCMANICK AND GUIOMAR PAU

On 21 November 2012, UNAMID Acting Joint Special Representative (JSR) and Joint Chief Mediator *ad hoc* Aichatou Mindaoudou, together with the parties to the Doha Document for Peace in Darfur (DDPD), discussed with the leadership of the African Union the progress made so far, and the remaining challenges, in implementing the Document's provisions.

The meetings, held at the AU's headquarters in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, brought together the Chairperson of the Darfur Regional Authority (DRA), Dr. Tigani Seisi, the Sudanese Minister of State, Amin Hassan Omer, the Chairperson of the African Union Commission, Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, and the

AU Peace and Security Commissioner, Ramtane Lamamra.

The DRA Chair highlighted the priorities of the institution, which include creating an environment conducive to the return of internally displaced people and refugees, facilitating reconstruction and development in Darfur, and conducting internal dialogue and consultation. Dr. Seisi requested that the AU advocate for the upcoming Darfur Donor's Conference, set to take place in Doha, Qatar.

During the meeting, the Acting JSR called attention to the importance of unconditional access to all areas of Darfur so the international community can assist the population more effectively and, in particular, so UNAMID can



Representatives from the Darfur Regional Authority, the Government of Sudan and UNAMID meet with the Chairperson of the African Union Commission in Addis Ababa. Photo by Abdourahman Ibrahim.

implement its mandate related to the protection of civilians. She concluded by commending the spirit of cooperation between the parties.

"I encourage the Govern-

ment and the DRA to redouble their efforts to accelerate the implementation of the DDPD and to sustain their cooperation with UNAMID," she said. ■

Abu Shouk, North Darfur



On 18 December 2012, a football team from El Fajar school for boys celebrates winning a UNAMID-organized tournament in the Abu Shouk camp for internally displaced people. Six different teams from high schools in the Abu Shouk, Al Salam and Zamzam camps participated in the games. Photo by Sojoud Elgarrai.

Burkina Faso Supports Peace Efforts in Darfur

BY RANIA ABDULRAHMAN



On 24 December 2012, Burkina Faso Prime Minister Luc-Adolphe Tiao meets with UNAMID Deputy Joint Special Representative Mohamed Yonis and other senior staff at Mission headquarters in El Fasher, North Darfur. Photo by Sojoud Elgarrai.

On 25 and 26 December, an official delegation of Burkina Faso, led by Prime Minister Luc-Adolphe Tiao, conducted a visit to Darfur to assess the situation on the ground and to explore ways to enhance Burkina Faso's support to UNAMID. The delegation, which started its tour in the North

Darfur capital of El Fasher, met with Mission officials to discuss UNAMID's efforts to advance peace and stability in the region.

During the meetings, UNAMID Deputy Joint Special Representative (Operations & Management) Mohamed Yonis outlined Burkina Faso's contribution to the peace process in Darfur and commended the work of the country's peacekeepers. "The troops have proved their professionalism and dedication, and have played a pivotal role in implementing our mandate," said Mr. Yonis.

In an interview, the Prime Minister spoke about the situation in Darfur and noted that, despite an overall improvement, the situation remains

complex due to a surge in the number of attacks. "The international community should put more effort in working with the authorities of the country to collaborate with the Darfuri communities and encourage negotiations to continue with the rebel movements," said Mr. Tiao, who emphasized the importance of the armed movements joining the peace process. "Without them joining in, it will be difficult to stabilize Darfur," he said.

Burkina Faso has been contributing to the peace efforts in Darfur since 2008, with more than 800 troops on the ground, operating in three locations in West and Central Darfur. ■

El Daein, East Darfur



On 3 December 2012, UNAMID personnel unload beds for delivery to the hospital in El Daein, East Darfur. The Mission presented 300 beds to the only facility providing healthcare services to the local population in the state. Photo by Albert González Farran.

Zamzam, North Darfur



On 19 December 2012, women from the Zamzam camp for internally displaced people work on recommendations during a forum organized to raise awareness of issues related to gender-based violence. Photo by Sojoud Elgarrai.

Darfur Joins in Human Rights Day Celebrations

BY SHARON LUKUNKA AND ZAHIRUL ISLAM

On 10 December 2012, hundreds of community leaders, students, local authorities and UNAMID personnel joined the global celebration of Human Rights Day, which this year followed the theme of “My Voice Counts.” The day was marked with several events throughout Darfur, including dances, traditional songs and drama. The celebrations focused on the right to participate in public life, and helped generate public discussions about human rights.

In an event organized by the North Darfur Ministry of Education and UNAMID in the Abu Shouk camp for internally displaced people near El Fasher, women articulated their concerns regarding peace

through song and dance, and requested that the parties to the conflict stop the war.

Also in North Darfur, in a ceremony held in Shagra village, located about 20 kilometres southwest of El Fasher, UNAMID marked the day with activities to highlight the importance of human rights. During the programme, women expressed their need for basic rights, including access to water, health services and education.

In El Geneina, West Darfur, UNAMID held a seminar on trial standards for 30 participants drawn from various local institutions and organizations. The event emphasized the importance of fair trials and the need for strengthening



On 10 December 2012, students perform a drama presentation to celebrate Human Rights Day at the Taiba secondary school in the Abu Shouk camp for displaced people, North Darfur. The event, organized by UNAMID and the State Ministry of Education, focused on the theme “My Voice Counts.” Photo by Zahirul Islam.

rule of law institutions.

In Nyala, South Darfur, members of local youth group Al-Mashish read the 30 articles of the Universal Declara-

tion of Human Rights. And a radio programme broadcast a discussion on the Declaration and current issues related to human rights. ■

Force Commander on Darfur's Blue Helmets

In an interview with *Voices of Darfur*, UNAMID Force Commander, Lieutenant General Patrick Nyamvumba, talked about the challenges and the determination of UNAMID's peacekeepers as they work for peace in Darfur.

BY RANIA ABDULRAHMAN



On 3 October 2012, UNAMID Force Commander, Lt. Gen. Patrick Nyamvumba, addresses the Nigerian peacekeepers who are posted in El Geneina, West Darfur, after a convoy suffered an ambush the previous night. Four peacekeepers were killed and eight injured in the assault. The incident, which involved a Nigerian military patrol, occurred approximately two kilometres from the Mission's regional headquarters. UNAMID personnel were heavily fired upon from several directions, and returned fire. Photo by Albert González Farran.

Since the creation of the first United Nations peacekeeping mission in 1948, the “blue helmet” has been emblematic of operations that work to create the right environment for lasting peace in countries torn by conflict. The peacekeepers who wear the blue helmets work in hazardous conditions around the world, and put their lives at risk for the greater good of humanity.

In July 2007, the United Nations Security Council adopted Resolution 1769, establishing the African Union - United Nations Mission in Darfur (UNAMID), the largest, most expensive and the first joint

peacekeeping operation. Since the first blue-helmeted troops set foot in Sudan's western region, UNAMID has been carrying out a difficult task in a large territory nearly the size of France. The political situation is fragile, there is no comprehensive peace agreement, and the environment lacks a fully developed infrastructure.

In September 2009, Lt. Gen. Patrick Nyamvumba of Rwanda was appointed as UNAMID Force Commander. More than 16,000 military personnel work under his leadership in 35 locations across Darfur. To understand the complexity and the challenging work of these peacekeepers in

carrying out their duties, especially as they relate to the protection of civilians, *Voices of Darfur* interviewed the Force Commander at UNAMID's Headquarters in El Fasher, North Darfur.

Voices of Darfur: How would you assess UNAMID's military performance and its contribution to the peace efforts in Darfur?

Nyamvumba: First of all, the military, as part of the Mission, draws its tasks from the mandate as prescribed by the UN Security Council. The core of the Mission's mandate is protection of civilians. The military takes lead on physical

protection. UNAMID's troops are providing 24/7 protection operations throughout Darfur. Every day we have more than 150 patrols conducted by brave men and women who are out there to provide security in areas specified as hotspots.

Also, UNAMID's troops are supporting the efforts of UN agencies and other aid actors by providing escorts to facilitate humanitarian assistance. In addition, the military component is involved in community support activities, including serving in hospitals that are open to the public, digging water boreholes to address some of the root causes of the conflict, providing capacity-building training in different skills and building schools and other livelihood facilities. In fact, recently, a women's market was built by one of UNAMID's contingents in Nertiti, Central Darfur.

Regarding the security environment in Darfur and to what extent UNAMID has contributed to stabilising the situation, I think when we pick isolated incidents in the general context, we miss the point. My understanding is that if it wasn't for UNAMID's presence, the situation could be much different than it is today. Having said that, there is room for improvement in terms of how we implement the mandate, and how we do our operations on a daily basis. We can't deny the sacrifices that have been made on the part of the peacekeepers, all of whom have come here with the aim of helping the people of Darfur realize peace.

VoD: UNAMID operates under Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter, which authorises the Mission to take necessary action to protect its personnel, facilities and installations to ensure the security and freedom of movement of its personnel, and, above all, to protect civilians. How have UNAMID forces dealt with the situation in Darfur within this framework?

Nyamvumba: There are so many incidents one can refer to. There have been times when UNAMID was able to go to places where even the local forces were not able to reach. The troops perform with the understanding that Chapter VII is applicable in their self-defence, in carrying out the mandate and when it comes to the protection of civilians.

One has to exercise caution when performing under Chapter VII. We cannot become part of the conflict, but it can help us to be able to assert ourselves where we need to, so we have the freedom of action. We may not have been able to do that in all circumstances. We let all the peacekeepers know that the only thing that can save

“To me, there can be no more serious motivation than when peacekeepers die in the line of duty. Ultimately, if we achieve peace, then we honour the lives of our colleagues who have paid the ultimate price.”

them and bring credibility to the Mission is that they need to be robust. And robustness is guided by the terms of the rules of engagement, cited in Chapter VII.

VoD: Can you tell us about the rules of engagement concept in peacekeeping operations in general and UNAMID in particular?

Nyamvumba: The rules of engagement are generally designed according to a specific mandate. In UNAMID, we are operating under Chapter VII, which provides a specific set of rules of engagement, authorizing us to use force, including deadly force and in the protection of civilians. In general, these rules should be applied and used within the context of the threat at the time, so the threat determines what force to use. In my view, those rules are good enough in that they give us the flexibility in UNAMID to escalate depending on the nature of the threat.

The commander on the ground will have to read the situation. If the threat is

endangering the lives of civilians or peacekeepers, nothing should stop them from using force. Otherwise, if it's not dangerous, then they can use other means, including persuasion and negotiation. What is important is that the rules of engagement give us flexibility in the event that we are threatened as peacekeepers, in the event that people under our protection are threatened, and it also gives us the flexibility to intervene when we know that civilians are in danger and it is within our means to give that protection.

UNAMID has used this concept on many occasions in pursuing its mandate. Recently, in Tawila, North Darfur, when civilians met a patrol and told them that

their vehicle had been taken by armed thugs, the patrol turned back, got the vehicle, and returned it to them. Also, another example was the World Food Programme trucks that were stolen between

Saraf Omra and Kabkabiya in North Darfur in January 2012. We mobilised troops from Kabkabiya and Nertiti to intercept them and returned the trucks to WFP. There are many cases where we exercised the right of using Chapter VII and the rules of engagement.

VoD: Are the troops in the field able to articulate the rules of engagement in the same way you have outlined them here?

Nyamvumba: Normally they should be able to do so because, before any troops are deployed here, they must undergo pre-deployment training. But that is left to the troop-contributing countries. We share all this information with them. At the moment, we have had the same troop-contributing countries for a period of time. These troops, by now, should understand the nature of operations here in Darfur and the nature of the mandate. In addition, we try as much as possible, as soon as the troops are deployed in the mission

“UNAMID is here on the ground, day after day, living the experience, learning the lessons to make it better. It’s not an easy task, but we remain committed.”

area, to have them get to know the rules of engagement, the environment and the culture in Darfur so they have a fair understanding of what is expected of them.

VoD: Since the establishment of UNAMID, 43 peacekeepers have been killed, nine of them in 2012. Critics say that these deaths indicate an ineffectiveness or weakness on the part of UNAMID. What is your response to this?

Nyamvumba: I don’t believe that there is anybody who would be weak to the extent that they want to lose their lives for no reason. UNAMID should be seen in the context of the expectations of the people of Darfur. This conflict has been ongoing since 2003, and with the deployment of international forces, the first expectation is that the conflict would cease or stop. Unfortunately, that did not happen, which created a misunderstanding about UNAMID’s mandate and what UNAMID can or can’t do.

We should always remember two things. First, in a normal peacekeeping operation, troops are not deployed to fight; they are deployed to make sure that parties to the peace agreement are following its provisions. That is why it’s called peacekeeping. Therefore, all kinds of attacks on peacekeepers are classified as international crimes, and those who commit such crimes should be held accountable.

Second, each of the deaths since 2007 was the result of an ambush. This kind of attack happens suddenly and is well organized. When the first bullet is shot, it takes a normal human being between 20 and 30 second to react. This kind of attack has claimed lives in the most sophisticated armies in the world. In fact, to have lost this number of peacekeepers, in my view, is an indication of the amount of risk that peacekeepers have to operate in here. When you are ambushed and the first bullet takes you, it cannot be said it is ineffectiveness.

There is still room for improvement,

but our posture over the last few years has also drastically changed to the extent that it has minimised fatalities. I don’t agree that the number of peacekeepers that we have lost in any way suggests weakness from our side, as far as the implementation of our mandate is concerned. When you look at international forces not involved in peacekeeping, but are actually engaged in fighting war, their number of casualties compared to ours, I don’t think would suggest a failure on our part.

VoD: As the Force Commander, what is the first thing you say to your troops after they have been attacked in the line of duty? And how do you motivate them following an incident in which peacekeepers have paid the ultimate price?

Nyamvumba: It is unfortunate to continue losing lives in Darfur. But what I think about this, and what I tell troops after these attacks, is that they have to think about the lives of their colleagues. Why have they lost their lives? What have they lost their lives for? And how should their lives be honoured? In my view, the only way they can do that is by doing the right thing so their colleague’s lives would not have been lost in vain.

They died for a good cause, which is to bring peace. That should give them a challenge and the motivation to ensure they achieve what their colleagues died for. To me, there can be no more serious motivation than when peacekeepers die in the line of duty. Ultimately, if we achieve peace, then we honour the lives of our colleagues who have paid the ultimate price.

Also, there are other occasions where the Mission has taken serious actions against peacekeepers that didn’t perform to the expected level and, as a consequence, had to be repatriated. These actions are taken for the credibility of the Mission and the troops themselves.

VoD: UNAMID troops work in a difficult environment. Could you tell us about the conditions in which

peacekeepers operate in Darfur and how this might affect their work?

Nyamvumba: There are so many factors here. Just starting with the weather, our troops conduct patrols with their helmets and body armour in a temperature that goes sometimes beyond 45 degrees Celsius. Very few of the armoured personnel carriers are air conditioned. In addition, the troops are serving away from homes and families and they operate in a very stressful environment. Also, we have to take into consideration other aspects of operations here that our troops have to deal with in their daily work, such as the infrastructure or the nature of the roads.

For example, the distance from El Fasher to Tawila is 70 kilometres. By air it takes 20 minutes, but by road it takes three hours. That gives an indication of the nature of the roads one has to use here. Also, the complexity of the Mission itself is a factor. In other peacekeeping operations, it is presumed that you have a peace agreement, so there is clarity of tasks, ensuring that the parties to the agreement stick to what they have signed. But in a political environment like ours, things are highly complex. We don’t have an all-inclusive peace agreement, and probably this is the greatest challenge. Because of this, the troops on the ground, besides exercising and pushing their physical ability to the limit, also have to push their thinking. It is about trying to navigate their way through a whole host of political issues and dynamics.

Before patrolling in areas that have experienced tribal conflicts and before intervening in any tribal setting, the peacekeepers must know who the head of the tribe is and what the tribe’s issues are. In the end, working here requires more physical and mental energy to do the job. For this reason, we encourage troops not to overstay. Some of them rotate after six months, and the majority after nine months. After doing their work here, the troops will be exhausted both physically and mentally.

VoD: The Security Council adopted a resolution to reduce the number of troops serving in UNAMID. Do you think this “rightsizing” will impact the Mission’s ability to protect civilians?

Nyamvumba: I don’t think so because the issue here should not be about



On 18 April 2012, girls from the Abu Shouk camp for internally displaced people, North Darfur, dance and sing in front of the UNAMID Force Commander, Lt. Gen. Patrick Nyamvumba, to celebrate the opening ceremony of 10 new classrooms for three primary schools in the camp. The rooms were built by Rwandan troops as one of UNAMID's quick-impact projects. Photo by Albert González Farran.



On 8 May 2010 at Nyala airport, an Egyptian peacekeeper prays beside the coffins containing the corpses of his late colleagues. Two Egyptian peacekeepers were killed the previous day and three other were seriously wounded in an ambush near Katila village, 85 kilometres south of Edd al Fursan, South Darfur, by a group of unidentified armed men. Photo by Albert González Farran.



Top: On 22 February 2012, UNAMID Force Commander, Lt. Gen. Patrick Nyamvumba, addresses the peacekeepers who were blocked by a rebel group for two days in the village of Shegeg Tova, about 60 kilometres from Umm Baru, North Darfur. A total of 55 peacekeepers, mainly Senegalese troops, were stopped during a patrol on 19 February by more than 100 armed men belonging to the Justice and Equality Movement. After a show of force and round-the-clock negotiations, JEM forces lifted the blockade on the UNAMID troops and released two civilian staff and one police advisor who were being detained. Photo by Albert González Farran.

Left: The conditions of the roads and the tough terrain in Darfur affect the daily work of UNAMID peacekeepers. During the rainy season, many roads are flooded. In June 2010, peacekeepers undertake a road exercise, called “Haboob Chase,” in North and West Darfur. Photo by Albert González Farran.

“UNAMID’s presence is proof of the commitment of the entire international community toward Darfur. Indeed, we are here to keep the peace, and to facilitate in making it, so it’s in the hands of the people who own this land to decide which future they want for their children.”

numbers. It should be about effectiveness. In terms of rightsizing, when it comes to the implementation of the review of uniformed personnel, most of the units that have been repatriated were enabling units, which were supposed to help us deploy forces. Yes, we are losing two battalions. But in my view, the numbers we have, if effectively employed can still do the job. However, we do still need some enabling units, particularly utility helicopters to give us quicker mobility.

In the end, the idea of the rightsizing is about how to mobilise resources effectively. Because Darfur is nearly 500,000 square kilometres, during the review of uniformed personnel we had to do what we called conflict mapping. We categorised different areas according to the security level, from high to low. For instance, the hotspots, where there is a serious volume of conflict, are going to be a focus in terms of concentration of forces.

While it is true that the geographic

area is large, there are unpopulated areas. For example, if you go beyond Malha, North Darfur, there is a desert, so we don’t need to have troops there. The overall idea is that the troops will be concentrated in the hotspot areas, and at the moment there is no indication to say that we are overstretched. I believe that with the right tools and mindset, we can still do the job.

Finally, I would like to say that UNAMID is here on the ground, day after day, living the experience, learning the lessons to make it better. It’s not an easy task, but we remain committed. UNAMID’s presence is proof of the commitment of the entire international community toward Darfur. Indeed, we are here to keep the peace, and to facilitate in making it, so it’s in the hands of the people who own this land to decide which future they want for their children. The road to peace may be difficult and may require sacrifices, but we believe it is not impossible. ■

CONFLICT RESOLUTION

A New Sense of Solidarity in East Darfur

East Darfur has been home to violent tribal clashes, but traditional conflict-resolution mechanisms are having an impact on peaceful coexistence in one of Darfur's newest states.

BY ALBERT GONZÁLEZ FARRAN



On 8 October 2012, Ms. Kaltoum Adam weaves a basket in the Al Neem camp for internally displaced people in El Daein, East Darfur. Photo by Albert González Farran.

In El Daein, the capital of the new state of East Darfur, there are more than 30 different tribes living together in close proximity. During the past several years, clashes between these groups over the control of land and other natural resources have led to violence. In one such episode in 2012, fighting between the Rezeigat and Misseriya ethnic groups resulted in several dead. While tribal relations in East Darfur and its capital city have sometimes been tense, civic leaders have been relying on age-old methods of dialogue to resolve their differences.

Although these methods don't al-

ways work, they are widely perceived to be critical tools to make coexistence possible in East Darfur. Coupled with the progress in intertribal negotiations is a renewed sense of the strength of ethnic diversity in the area. "Living together gives us more security against any criminal action," says Mr. Mohamed Ibrahim, the leader of the Rezeigat tribe in El Daein. "Our unity benefits development and our relationship favours all economic activities."

The Rezeigat tribe, which is both ethnically Arab and nomadic, is one of the largest groups in South and East Darfur.

The Rezeigat people own most of the land in the area. Historically, the Rezeigat have been pastoralists, tending camels and horses, and have had close relationships with other tribes and communities. "We have always been like this," says Mr. Ibrahim. Currently, the Rezeigat lends land to two large displaced communities in El Daein: the South Sudanese Dinka who occupy the Khor Omer camp for displaced people, and more than 20 different tribes who are living together in the Al Neem camp, which is the temporary home of some 45,000 displaced.

The Rezeigat's lending of the land doesn't come with an expiration date. The Rezeigat have assured the displaced families that they can stay for good if they so desire. "The internally displaced people are already part of our state," says the Rezeigat leader, conceding that the presence of Dinikas in East Darfur is a sensitive issue in the international diplomacy between Sudan and South Sudan.

The other tribes living in Al Neem camp have expressed gratitude to the Rezeigat for their hospitality. The leader of the Al Neem camp, Mr. Sayid Al Zahir, says residents of the camp have the highest level of respect for the Rezeigat. "Our humanitarian relationship with the Rezeigat and constant communications prevents anything bad from happening," he says.

In addition to being the leader of the camp, Mr. Al Zahir is leader of the Birgit tribe, the majority ethnic group in Al Neem. The Birgit community is historically linked with the Rezeigat because the tribe has had arrangements with the Rezeigat, in many other locations, to farm and cultivate the land. These arrangements have a long tradition, and it is presumed they will last well into the future. However, any such deal comes with a normal amount of disputes, which are typically resolved with negotiations between the tribe leaders. "In land arrangements, there is always a network with the host community," says Mr. Al Zahir. "These arrangements usually operate perfectly."

Mr. Al Zahir chairs the high committee of internally displaced people in the area. This committee consists of 30 leaders that organize all arrangements and solve any problems in the camp when they arise. When any conflict emerges, negotiation begins. "We sit down, we dis-



cuss, and sooner or later we agree on the solution," says Mr. Al Zahir.

The Native Administration Office, a building located near the market in El Daein, is the location where these dialogues take place. Land disputes, aggression and other

offenses are resolved over a cup of tea and a conversation in this office. Only crimes such as theft, rape or those that aren't able to be resolved peacefully through dialogue are turned over to the regular court system. The rest of the problems, by far the vast majority, are solved by negotiation between community leaders.

Because of the success of this method, which is now fairly common across Darfur thanks to a renewed interest in Darfur's traditional justice mechanisms, people are increasingly turning to the Native Administration Offices instead of the more formal court system. "When a dispute happens by accident,

Even if the peaceful coexistence between so many different tribes may seem difficult at times, the camps in El Daein are serving as models of what is possible when different agendas lead to dialogue and peaceful negotiation.



Clockwise from top left :

On 3 December 2012, members of the Rezeigat tribe in El Daein, East Darfur, perform traditional dances and songs.

On 9 October 2012, a group of Rezeigat leaders and members of the Native Administration Office (NAO) in El Daein, East Darfur, stand in front of the NAO building, the location where tribal disputes are resolved.

On 8 October 2012, Ms. Maria Mohamed works in her bakery in the Al Neem camp for displaced people in El Daein, East Darfur.

On 8 October 2012, Mr. Sayid Al Zahir, leader of the internally displaced people living in the Al Neem camp in El Daein, East Darfur, walks through the camp.

Photos by Albert González Farran.



Despite some friction, the various tribes living in the East Darfur are engaging in talks with a renewed sense of solidarity as displaced Darfuris.

In addition to facilitating such negotiations, UNAMID peacekeepers have been conducting patrols in the area to ensure a stable enough environment for talks to take place. “We need UNAMID to reinforce our security because we can’t activate our negotiation tools with constant danger and threats,” says Mr. Al Zahir, noting that, while the area is relatively calm, there are still some issues. “Our lands are not completely safe yet,” he says.

Even if the peaceful coexistence between so many different tribes may seem difficult at times, the camps in El Daein are serving as models of what is possible when different agendas lead to dialogue and peaceful negotiation. Despite some friction, the various tribes living in the East Darfur are engaging in talks with a renewed sense of solidarity as displaced Darfuris. “Among all of us, we have created a new and unique tribe,” says Mr. Al Zahir. “That it is the displaced people tribe.” ■

it’s easy to solve,” says Mr. Zahir. “It’s only when a crime is committed intentionally that it takes a longer discussion and may eventually be transferred to the regular courts.”

Since arriving in the camp, the residents of Al Neem have intended to return to their original lands in the Al Salayia area, southwest of El Daein. Officially, the lands have never been their property, but they have had a longstanding agreement with Rezeigat to farm them freely. However, during their absence, the Rezeigat loaned the land out to others. Some tribes in Al Neem are committed to reactivating their original

agreement with the Rezeigat to work the lands. Talks have been ongoing to develop a possible solution, with one idea being to divide the land between the new occupants and the returnees.

The African Union - United Nations Mission in Darfur (UNAMID) has been supporting these talks through workshops and other dialogue-driven events to encourage all concerned parties to come to the negotiation table. The community leaders in El Daein say they appreciate the work UNAMID is doing in the area. “The Mission is part of our community,” says Mr. Ibrahim.

CHILDREN



On 22 November 2012 in the Abu Shouk camp for displaced people in North Darfur, Darlanean, once a child bride, is pictured in her house. Darlanean, who has been divorced twice, was first forced to get married when she was 9 years old. Later, when she was 13, she was forced into marriage again. Now she is studying at the University of El Fasher and has no plans to remarry. Photo by Albert González Farran.

The Girls Who Become Brides

Marriage with girls under the age of 18 is still common in some rural areas of Darfur, despite many outspoken Darfuri advocates working to highlight the implications and risks associated with the practice.

BY SHARON LUKUNKA

Sarah was still a child on the day of her wedding. At age 14, she was forced to marry a man seven years older than she was. Now, four years after her wedding, she has a one-year-old child. Her story is not unusual in Darfur, where many young girls living in rural areas are compelled to enter marriage.

"If my father says that I have to marry a man, I have to," Sarah says. Following the death of her mother, Sarah's father arranged for her to be married so

she could take care of herself and her siblings. To support the family, Sarah works in the farms and fetches firewood to sell in the market. "Before I got married, I wanted to finish school and study to be a teacher," she says. "I would prefer going to school because it is not easy to take care of a home and a baby while working."

Ms. Kaltoum Ibrahim Ahmed, a resident of the Abu Shouk camp for displaced people and an outspoken advocate

for women, explains that these practices have been going on for a long time in Darfur, especially in rural areas, and in other parts of Sudan. Early marriages, she says, typically deny girls the opportunity to pursue an education, and rob them of their childhood. In addition, most child brides, burdened by their responsibilities, do not interact with their peers or cultivate friendships outside the household.

"Early marriages should be discouraged because girls suffer a lot; they are

not prepared to handle the responsibilities that come with the union,” says Ms. Ahmed. “The girls get frustrated and some even attempt to run away because, in most cases, they find they are not compatible with their husbands.”

A recent report released by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), entitled “Marrying Too Young,” defines child marriage as a custom in which one or both partners are under age 18 and, although it can involve boys, affects girls more broadly. The report, which relies on data compiled from 2000 to 2011, notes that most countries have set 18 as the minimum legal age of marriage. However, parental consent and local custom often override existing laws, making for a significant number of child marriages each year around the world. The document identifies rural, poor and undereducated girls as most at risk of becoming child brides.

In Sudan, the 2010 Convention on the Rights of the Child defines children as people under the age of 18. Sudanese law does not establish a minimum age for marriage. The Sudan Household Health Survey, conducted in 2006 by the Government of Sudan in coordination with international organizations, indicates that 9.4 per cent of the girls in North Darfur, 18.1 in West Darfur, and 14.5 in South Darfur were married before the age of 15. In 2006, the percentage of married females under the age of 18 was 31.1 in North Darfur, 49.2 in West Darfur and 47.5 in South Darfur.

Despite the prevalence of the practice, it is questioned by many Darfuris. One of them is Ms. Nefisa Mohammed, an activist originally from Kutum, North Darfur. She herself married at age 16. Having learned from her own experiences, she now advises women that it is their duty to educate their daughters and discourage early marriage.

“Early marriage has severe consequences on families; there are misunderstandings in the couple and, in most cases, the marriages end in divorce,” she

says. “This is a huge problem that young women in Darfur are encountering, and most of the time the girls are afraid to speak out against the practice for fear of disrespecting their families.”

Ms. Mohammed, who has lived since 2003 in the Abu Shouk camp for displaced people, on the outskirts of El Fasher, devotes much of her time to promoting women’s rights. She serves as a counsellor, listening to the problems of women and girls and assisting them when needed.

Since its inception, the African Union - United Nations Mission in Darfur (UNAMID) has been working to raise awareness of these issues through its various components, such as the Gen-

“This is a huge problem that young women in Darfur are encountering, and most of the time the girls are afraid to speak out against the practice for fear of disrespecting their families.”

—Nefisa Mohammed

der Advisory Unit, in coordination with local partners such as the United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF). Ms. Yegera-work Angagaw, UNAMID’s Chief Gender Advisor, points out that addressing the issue of child brides is critical.

“In Darfur, while mainstream culture generally rejects the practice, certain rural communities engage in it,” says Ms. Angagaw. “Marrying girls before they have reached adulthood affects not only the girls themselves, but also the entire family and the larger communities in which the practice takes place.”

Ms. Angagaw explains that there are several root causes of the practice in rural Darfur and in areas where there are large numbers of displaced people. These causes, she says, include poverty and the distance of schools from settlements. “Parents sometimes have their girls wed as an alternative to exposing them to physical attack or abduction,”

she says. “This practice is common in areas where there is a high prevalence of women being sexually assaulted in the fields as they collect firewood or farm the land.”

Another factor contributing to the practice of child brides in Darfur is the price of an education. Ms. Angagaw explains that, especially in poorer rural communities in Darfur, families typically send their sons to school and marry off their girls at a young age because they cannot afford the price of education for the entire family. In addition, she says, poor families sometimes opt to marry off girls to someone with money as a way to help lift the family from poverty.

“Any solution to the problem of a durable, sustained peace in Darfur requires addressing some of the root causes of the conflict that also are causes of the child bride phenomenon,” says Ms. Angagaw. “Eradicating poverty, implementing a universal and free education system and cultivating widespread economic development will go a long way to deterring families from compelling their young girls to wed.”

UNAMID’s Chief Gender Advisor went on to say that the practice itself becomes a root cause that is undermining the very communities that support it. “It generally prevents young girls from finishing their education because they must provide for their families and tend to their children,” she says. “Children having children only serves to undermine the fabric of communities.”

Ms. Angagaw notes that UNAMID has been working with the Government of Sudan and various international and national nongovernmental organizations to raise awareness of these issues among local audiences, to highlight the importance of education for young girls and to ensure that appropriate Sudanese laws are respected and upheld. “In the end, it is the responsibility of Darfur’s people to ensure that the practice is strongly discouraged,” she says. “There cannot be a bright future of peace in Darfur if a

large segment of the population is disenfranchised, having no choice in education or vocation.”

UNICEF, for its part, has been working with the Government of Sudan to build social welfare programmes that offer legal protection to children, and to raise awareness of child rights. Most child marriages are forced marriages in which the consent of the child is not considered before the consummation of the union. This practice is considered a violation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states that “marriage shall be entered into only with the free and full consent of the intending spouses.”

Darlanean, an unwilling participant in a forced marriage when she was a girl, managed to leave the union and pursue her education. At the age of nine, Darlanean’s family could not afford to keep her in school so her father arranged a wedding with a 30-year-old man. “When my father told me I was going to be married, I felt my life had been ruined,” Darlanean recalls. “I didn’t want to be married and I cried in protest.”

After several years of marriage, Darlanean divorced and returned to her family’s home. She tells the story of how she found her family and friends gathered in her house as she was returning from school one day. Her father had arranged a second marriage for her. This time, the groom was a 40-year-old man who had another wife. “I was only 13 when I was forced to marry again,” she says. “I cried and ran out; I wanted to be in school rather than being married.”

Darlanean fought to get out of the marriage, and eventually separated from her husband. She has continued her education with support from her relatives, and now is studying Art at the University of El Fasher. “After my experience, I want to concentrate on my studies and I am not thinking of getting married,” she says.

Outside of the social implications, especially education, child marriage puts girls at risk of life-threatening pregnancies. Maternal deaths related to pregnancy and childbirth are an important factor in the mortality rates for girls between the age of 15 and 19 worldwide, accounting for some 50,000 deaths each year globally. Usually, adolescent wives



On 13 December 2012 in the Abu Shouk camp for displaced people in North Darfur, Nefisa Mohammed, a women’s rights activist and counsellor, is surrounded by some of the young women and girls she has been working to help. Photo by Albert González Farran.

“There cannot be a bright future of peace in Darfur if a large segment of the population is disenfranchised, having no choice in education or vocation.”

—Yeagerwork Angagaw

are expected to get pregnant soon after marrying, often leading to tragic consequences for the mothers, who are still children themselves, and their babies.

Girls’ bodies are not fully developed and are therefore not equipped for pregnancy or labour. Statistics show that pregnancy complications for child brides are double that of women above the age of 20. This was the case with Masher, an 18-year-old Darfuri who was forced into marriage at age 13. Because she was so young, she developed complications during pregnancy and had a miscarriage. Following the miscarriage, doctors told her that she would not be able to have children.

The UNFPA report states that girls under age 15 are five times more likely to die in childbirth than women in their 20s, and that girls age 15 to 18 are twice as likely to die in childbirth. The children of child brides are 60 per cent more likely to die by their first birthday than children delivered by mothers over age 19.

In an effort to start a global conversa-

tion about the devastating impact of child marriage—which, according to the UN Population Fund, happens about 37,000 times each day worldwide in more than 50 developing countries—the United Nations designated 11 October as International Day of the Girl Child. The day is designed to focus on promoting girls’ rights and highlighting gender inequality and the possible solutions to it. UN Population Fund statistics indicate that the annual rate in the number of child marriages is increasing, and will rise to 14.2 million a year by 2020, and 15.1 million a year by 2030, if measures are not taken to curb the current trend.

“By 2020, 14.2 million innocent young girls worldwide will be separated from their friends and family, deprived of an education and put in harm’s way because of child marriage,” said UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon in his remarks on the launch of the International Day of the Girl Child in 2012. “All members of society will benefit when we let girls be girls, not brides.” ■

It's Time for Darfur's Combatants to Lay Down Their Arms

Despite developments toward a peace agreement that includes all major armed movements, there remain many holdouts, a fact that makes progress in disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration a daunting challenge.

BY ADEREMI ADEKOYA

During the past several years, armed movements of varying significance have participated in the peace process by signing key documents, including the original Darfur Peace Agreement (DPA), an assortment of other agreements and the recent Doha Document for Peace in Darfur (DDPD). Despite some positive developments related to a comprehensive peace agreement that includes all major movements, there remain many holdouts, a fact that makes progress related to Darfur-wide disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) a daunting challenge.

In the meantime, the Government of Sudan, through the Sudan DDR Commission, has been leading an interim DDR exercise for the groups originally committing to the DPA in 2006 and surplus members of the Sudanese Armed Forces and the Popular Defence Forces. However, the DPA broke down and funding the reintegration of ex-combatants, which is normally supported through voluntary contributions, has been a challenge in Darfur primarily due to the lack of a comprehensive peace agreement on which the reintegration would be based.

Notwithstanding the many challenges associated with DDR in Darfur, UNAMID is unwavering in supporting the Sudan DDR Commission to plan and implement national DDR, community security and arms control programmes. UNAMID support to the Sudan DDR Commission includes providing advice on policy development and, for interim demobilization exercises, technical assistance, mission expertise and resources all designed to support public information

campaigns, medical screenings, HIV/AIDS counselling and security. In the programmes designed to address community security and arms control, UNAMID has been supporting the Sudan DDR Commission to help reduce civilian small arms and light weapons proliferation and local conflicts that make areas of return insecure for former combatants who have completed DDR.

For example, UNAMID provided the first Regional Conference on Small Arms and Light Weapons Control with logistics support and a communications campaign about the threat posed by small arms and light weapons in civilian hands. When the full DDR programmes take place, the corresponding community security programmes will address the possible security threats posed by ex-combatants, local conflicts and small arms proliferation in communities, and also will address issues related to the social exclusion of at-risk youth who have the potential for mobilization into armed movements and criminal groups due to lack of education, employment and basic skills.

As part of a broader strategy to support the consolidation of peace in Darfur, UNAMID has been implementing a complementary programme designed to support the efforts of the Government of Sudan to address the needs of young people and other vulnerable groups in sedentary communities and in camps for displaced people. The programme consists of community-based labour-intensive projects (CLIPs) that focus not only on building vocational skills but also on fostering reconciliation across Darfur.

In the CLIPs implemented so far, the

target groups—consisting primarily of at-risk youth—have acquired livelihood and life skills and have improved their employability and social integration. In the process of acquiring these valuable skills, the dedicated young people involved in these projects have been rebuilding the infrastructure of their fragile communities and, in doing so, have been contributing to a reduction of violence and conflict in their communities.

UNAMID's DDR officers have facilitated 17 CLIPs across Darfur, all designed to cultivate vocational skills through on-the-job-training. As an additional benefit, these CLIPs are providing a framework for state government and locality structures to launch similar projects in other areas in Darfur. During the first phase of the CLIPs programme, more than 2,500 young people have participated as the direct beneficiaries.

While the armed movements that have refused to sign the DDPD have been preventing a comprehensive peace, and are blocking formal DDR exercises, UNAMID continues to work with the Sudanese Government and communities across Darfur, and has been coordinating with international and national nongovernmental organizations on interim strategies to build a framework for the eventual full-scale DDR programmes. Clearly, the challenges are abundant, but they are not insurmountable. The people of Darfur have long been ready for peace. It's time for all combatants to lay down their arms and embrace the future of Darfur. ■

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Malha: Homeland of the Midobs

Malha, a North Darfur town inhabited by Sudan's Midob tribe, is a serene and mountainous locality rich in tourist attractions such as a large volcanic crater, mountain springs and a lake.

BY ABDULLAHI SHUAIBU

Malha, one of the most northern towns in Darfur, is commonly known as “Midob town” due to the high concentration of the Midob ethnic group in the area. The terrain in Malha is flat, with dusty plains broken by several mountain ranges. The town is home to the famous Malha volcanic crater, which is a center of attraction in the locality and was believed to have been formed 5,000 years ago. Today, the crater draws Sudani tourists, who relax beside the lake and enjoy the views from hikes in the mountains.

This quiet and serene locality derives its Arabic name “Malha” (which translates as “salty”) from the abundant salty water in the area that emerges from volcanic

springs along the mountainsides. Activity in the area centers on the Midob villages, which are located at the foot of the mountains. Each family lives in a settlement that consists of a small number of separate dome-shaped huts that are constructed of poles, branches and grass. Married Midob women live with their children in the huts. Their husbands also live in the huts when they are not herding livestock or engaged in other vocations that take them away from their homes.

There are roughly 50,000 Midob-speaking people in Malha and the surrounding communities. A large percentage of the Midob live in the main town and are ruled by Malha's King, Tom Mo-

hamed El-Sayah, who is 75 years old and inherited the throne from his late father who reigned during the British colonial days in Sudan.

According to historians, the Midob language can be traced to the language of the Nubians in Northern Sudan. Current cultural practices and traditions link the Midob to the Mahas and Dongolawi, which are Nubian groups from the old town of Dongola in North Sudan. It is also mentioned in history books that the Midob were rulers in the Nubian civilization, with their roots extending deeply into Egypt. The Nubian civilization later became part of Egypt when Muhammad Ali Pasha invaded and occupied Sudan in 1820.



The landscape of Malha, a quiet and serene North Darfur locality that derives its Arabic name “Malha” (which translates as “salty”) from the abundant salty water in the area that emerges from volcanic springs along the mountainsides. Photo by Sojoud Elgarrai.

Today, Malha’s active population consists primarily of a large number of Midob pastoralists, who mainly herd goats, sheep and camels, and also keep donkeys and cattle. They rely on the acquisition of livestock for their livelihoods. Boys and men tend to the sheep and camels, while the women take care of the goats, cattle and donkeys, which are always kept in the settlements within easy reach of domestic water supplies and for transporting people and goods around town and to the market places in the area. In addition, the Midob are avid farmers, engaging in subsistence agriculture and producing various cereals, such as sorghum and millet, along with vegetables, to supplement their regular diet of meat from their animals.

“Our ancestors came from North Sudan near Egypt and they migrated through the Mellit valley before they finally settled by the hills in Malha,” says Mr.

Gamma El-Sayah, political adviser to the King, and his junior brother. “Although our tribe is subdivided into three clans, the Alshalko, the Aroteyi and the Tortey, we all migrated from Dongola, which is in North Sudan and was formerly a province of Upper Nubia, bordering the Nile.”

The highly respected King leads his people with the assistance of 11 *umdas* and more than 200 *sheiks*, the community leaders that aid in the administration of laws and Islamic injunctions. The members of this administrative structure also serve as the conflict-resolution body for the people of Malha. “Formerly, the kingship of the town was not inherited by the senior son,” says Mr. El-Sayah. “However, in 1926, the system was changed and the king was named by inheritance, with my brother becoming the king after our late father passed on.”

Mr. Salih Ismail, the Umda of the

Kinna community near Malha, explains that the Midob are a proud people with a rich cultural heritage and many active traditions. These practices include several types of dances that are performed to entertain, to celebrate weddings or to commemorate specific events and special occasions to honour the King and Malha’s many visitors. “Men and women dance in different formations to the rhythm of the big drums,” says Umda Ismail. “We also do victory songs for those who passed away and for praising our past and present kings.”

About the Malha volcanic crater, Umda Ismail explains that the Midob’s ancestors have long used the water of the crater and the nearby pastureland for their cattle. The community leader says that the volcanic crater produces a dark brown clay-like substance rich in minerals, called *gandaka* in the Midob dialect, that is eaten

“The water in the crater is medicinal; it possesses healing properties for people and animals, and cures ailments and disinfects injuries.”

—Salih Ismail

by the livestock in the area. “Gandaka makes the animal healthy,” he explains. “And the water in the crater is medicinal; it possesses healing properties for people and animals, and cures ailments and disinfects injuries.”

Beyond being of use to the Midob people to water and graze their animals, says Umda Ismail, the crater serves as one of the main draws to bring tourists from distant parts of Darfur. “The crater is a beauty to behold,” he says. “Many people travel to Malha just to catch a glimpse of this natural phenomenon and to take memorable photographs.”

In addition to being one of Darfur’s most notable tourist destinations, Malha is active year-round with traders coming from the far corners of Sudan and bordering countries. For their part, the young members of the Midob tribe are known to seek their fortunes in other areas, working jobs in Libyan border cities

or trading in Egypt to bring back goods to their home community. “Through regular visits and contacts, the Midob people take their livestock to Libyan and Egyptian markets for sale, and return with other products that are not available here in Malha,” says Mr. Ismail Amin, Malha’s Commissioner.

Mr. Amin explains that these interactions enrich the Midob with an understanding of current economic and political affairs, locally and abroad. He says that, through these exchanges, it is common for Midob to become successful business owners, investing their wealth in livestock expansion and building new residential accommodations in the town.

While the people of Malha are living peaceful lives, the area has not been without conflict. The African Union - United Nations Mission in Darfur (UNAMID) carries out regular patrols in and around

Malha to ensure protection for the Midob. UNAMID’s Team Site Commander in Malha, Captain Jeraldo Bantom, notes that the area has been peaceful and calm for more than a year. “We have not noted any recent threats to the communities but we keep to our regular duties to deter any outbreak of conflict,” he says.

In addition to conducting routine patrols, UNAMID peacekeepers are supporting the Malha communities through quick-impact projects (QIPs), which the Mission implements to rehabilitate schools, medical centres and other civic facilities to help elevate the lives of the people of Darfur. One example of a QIP implemented in Malha is a borehole project set up to supply an abundance of fresh water to local schools and hospitals.

As the peace process continues to gather momentum in Darfur, Malha’s community leaders express hope that the armed movements will endorse the current peace agreement, the Doha Document for Peace in Darfur (DDPD), to bring stability to the region. “We encourage all our men and women to participate in the peace process to sort out issues through dialogue and understanding, so that growth and development will come to Malha and indeed the whole of Darfur,” says Umda Ismail. ■

The volcanic crater in Malha. Water from the crater and grass from the nearby pastures have long been used by the Midob people for their cattle. The crater produces a dark brown substance, called gandaka in the Midob dialect, that is eaten by the animals in the area and is said to keep them healthy. Photo by Sojoud Elgarrai.



Charting Progress on the Role of Women

There is a concerted global momentum to address women's rights in conflict situations, and despite some setbacks and challenges, Darfur is making progress on women's issues.

BY EMADELDIN RIJAL



On 9 October 2012, dozens of women's group leaders from different parts of Darfur gather in El Fasher, North Darfur, for the concluding Open Days session to discuss the principles and progress related to United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security. Photo by Sojoud Elgarrai.

In many parts of Sudan, including in Darfur, there is a saying: “No matter how powerful a woman is, she is weak and has little value.” This unfortunate expression, the likes of which can be heard the world over, aptly characterises some Darfuri attitudes toward women here. As strong as the women of Darfur are, and as significant and lasting their contributions to Darfur society might be, an undercurrent of belittlement toward women runs deep in some Darfuri communities.

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 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.



Pictured here on 25 November 2012 is Ms. Nabila Abdilkarim, who works as legal advisor in the North Darfur Ministry of Justice and is a member of the High Committee for United Nations Security Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security. Photo by Albert González Farran.

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. In a statement in 2005, the Security Council called on UN Member States to implement Resolution 1325 through the development of national action plans and other national-level strategies.

Mr. Khalil Abdullah, the Government of Sudan's Minister of Social Affairs in North Darfur, sits on the state's High Committee for Implementing Resolution 1325. "It is for the sake of the important role of women in various fields that we welcome Resolution 1325," he says, noting that women in Darfur play an extremely important role, especially considering that 60 to 70 per cent of Darfur's social responsibilities fall to women.

Each year, UN Women, in partnership with the UN Department of Political Affairs, the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the United Nations Development Programme, sponsor the "Open Days" worldwide to provide a platform for

local women leaders to share their experiences, concerns and priorities as they contribute to national and regional efforts to resolve conflict and build security. The outcomes of these events inform and influence policies and programmes related to the implementation of Resolution 1325 and serve to highlight challenges faced by women in conflict resolution and peacebuilding.

In line with this global programme, each year Darfur holds the Open Day events in several localities to deliberate on the implementation status of Resolution 1325. In 2012, the Open Day sessions were organized by UNAMID's Gender Advisory Unit in collaboration with the Sudan Ministries of Social Affairs and the *Walis'* (Governors') Advisors on Women and Children in the five Darfur states. In October 2012, dozens of women leaders from different parts of Darfur came together in El Fasher, North Darfur, to share the findings of the preliminary sessions and to benchmark the achievements made so far against the objectives of the Resolution.

The workshop discussions indicated that a significant breakthrough has been made in connection to women's participation in the Darfur peace process and women's access to executive, political and legislative positions. How-

ever, workshop participants concluded that security remains the top concern for women throughout Darfur. "If we are to be empowered as major assets to our communities, we need security and stability," says Ms. Maryam Hussein, recalling provisions in the Doha Document for Peace in Darfur (DDPD) that indicate women and children are the people most affected by conflict.

Ms. Hussein, who is a member of the Legislative Council in West Darfur and a representative of internally displaced women, points out that in order for women to be secure and to play their role in the community, the Government of Sudan and the armed movements must be fully committed to the ceasefire and must focus on protection of civilians first and foremost. Indeed, progress has been made toward this end, as evidenced by the DDPD itself and the current negotiations to bring those armed movements that have not signed the DDPD to the table.

Apart from progress related to the women's provisions in the DDPD and the many Government committees for implementing Resolution 1325 across Darfur, state governments have set up advisory offices for women's and children's affairs and have allocated seats on the parliaments specifically for women's representatives. As one example of developments related to women's issues in recent years, the Government of North Darfur has trained a contingent of women police officers, who are specifically tasked to address issues related to women.

Despite these and other efforts designed to create an environment conducive to empowering women in Darfur, women's rights advocates say that much more needs to be done. "Women deserve better," says Ms. Shadia Shaltout, a former Advisor on Women's and Children's Affairs in the Government of Central Darfur. Ms. Shaltout, whose job was cut due to the Government's recent austerity measures implemented across Sudan, has expressed disdain for what she considers to be a decreasing number of women in positions of power across Darfur.

Having been hit by recession along



On 9 October 2012, dozens of women's group leaders from different parts of Darfur gather in El Fasher, North Darfur, for the concluding Open Days session to discuss the principles and progress related to United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security. Photo by Sojoud Elgarrai.

Looking to the future, the delegates at the final Open Day session recommended focusing on income-generating and livelihood programmes, especially for rural and nomadic women, and involving women in national constitution committees.

with the rest of Sudan, Darfur state governments have been implementing the required austerity policies, and in the process are causing some controversy among women's groups. "The austerity measures have had more of an impact on women," says Ms. Sadia Ali Adam, who works in the Ministry of Information in North Darfur.

Despite the recent austerity-related setbacks, women's advocates have pointed to significant progress made across Darfur in the economic, social and political empowerment of women. Looking to the future, the delegates at the final Open Day session recommended focusing on income-generating and livelihood programmes, especially for rural and nomadic women, and involving women in national constitution committees. The delegates

also recommended focusing on girls' education and stressed the importance of abiding by the benchmark of, at minimum, 25 per cent of the Government's decision-making positions being occupied by women.

In addition to developing these recommendations, delegates to the final Open Days session drew attention to the importance of establishing more women's centers across Darfur, and highlighted the importance of projects designed to help internally displaced women living in substandard conditions. Women's advocates, and indeed many working women in Darfur, are continuing to raise awareness of these issues and push for a better future for all Darfuris.

Ms. Shama Suleiman, who works at the Ministry of Health in West Dar-

fur, says the contributions of women to life in Darfur are significant. "The role of women in every single field is notable and continues to be great," she says. Ms. Suleiman points out that, as a result of the conflict, some Darfuri women are sharing the collective social burden by adopting orphaned children despite being faced with economic hardships of their own. "Three quarters of the burden falls on women as a result of these exceptional circumstances," she says, noting that many women in Darfur have lost their husbands and are working very hard to support their families.

While women's rights activists have been expressing guarded optimism about the increasingly prominent role women are playing in Government institutions across Darfur, the stark reality is that the long conflict has left much of the social and economic burden to the women, especially in keeping family and community structures intact. Ms. Nabila Abdulkarim, a legal advisor at the Ministry of Justice in North Darfur, sums up the role of women in Darfur with simple elegance: "Women in Darfur are the backbones of their families," she says. ■

Darfur's Many Colours: An Interview with Buhery Youssef

In an interview with *Voices of Darfur*, Buhery Youssef talks about his work as an artist and expresses his views about how to promote fine arts activities in Darfur.

BY ALA MAYYAH



On 14 November 2012, artist Buhery Mohammed Youssef paints in his studio, which also serves as a gallery, in El Geneina, West Darfur. In many of his paintings, Mr. Youssef carefully depicts the fragile lives of vulnerable Darfuris. Photo by Albert González Farran.

Buhery Youssef has been drawing since he was a young boy, inspired by Darfur's people and the animals and objects that populate the region's stark and rugged environments. Today, at 33 years old, Mr. Youssef has developed a reputation as one of the most talented artists in the region, not only in Sudan but also in the bordering Arabic and African counties. His talent has earned him several major accolades, including a growing collection of gold medals from regional art contests.

In many of his paintings, he care-

fully depicts the fragile lives of vulnerable Darfuris. In others, he portrays, in bright colour, the local traditions that underpin life in the villages that together form the backbone of western Sudan. In all of Mr. Youssef's work, regardless of the specific objects he depicts, subtle cues indicate his unique point of view in rejecting violence, encouraging compassion for those in need and remaining cautiously optimistic for a better future for Darfur.

In addition to painting regularly, Mr. Youssef, who resides in his hometown of

El Geneina, West Darfur, runs his own gallery for traditional art, and leases out another gallery for cultural activities. During his development into a professional artist who regularly exhibits in art shows around the region, he has had the opportunity to meet other accomplished artists, to share ideas and discuss ways to cultivate a love of art in Darfur. In an interview with *Voices of Darfur*, Mr. Youssef talked about this evolving dialogue and about his work as an artist in Darfur.

Voices of Darfur: As you started

drawing since childhood, is there one drawing you did in those days that you remember more than the others?

Youssef: Yes, It was a drawing of a man. I remember it very well not because of the subject of the drawing but because of the story behind it.

VoD: Would you like to tell us that story?

Youssef: I was in my first year in primary school, and the teacher drew a man for us, but I didn't like it so I told her that the drawing was wrong. She got upset with me and asked me to draw a better one, so I did and when she saw it she was so surprised that I could draw so well at that age that she showed it to the principal and all the teachers. Today, even when I consider the awards I've won during my career, I think about that drawing and how my teacher liked it.

VoD: Could you tell us about the art awards you've won?

Youssef: The first one was an award in fine arts for creative students in 2007 in El Gazeera State. The painting was of a peace dove. Also, as a student, I won the first and second gold medal in Northern Dungula in 2008. I had another gold medal for a painting in which I expressed that the strength of our country comes only through unity. I've also won a gold medal from North Darfur and another one from Egypt.

VoD: Other than winning awards, what has influenced you to improve and continue your work as an artist?

Youssef: First, my family support, which has always been a great privilege to me. And second, seeing good paintings of other Darfuri artists and having the opportunity to know them and interact with them. I have learned a lot from them. All that pushed me to continue painting.

VoD: Can you tell us a bit about other Darfuri artists you grew up with? Were they able to continue in their pursuit of art despite the hardship of the conflict here?

Youssef: Unfortunately, many artists I've known in West Darfur stopped painting. The economic situation has not been

"I mostly use a primitivism style of painting, and in some paintings I use both primitivism and expressionism. What I try to accomplish through my work is promoting old Darfuri culture and the social traditions that were used by the older generations."

conducive to sales, and social support has been lacking. Also, there hasn't been enough support from Government institutions or enough cultural programmes set up to support artists.

VoD: Do you dedicate a certain time during the day for drawing or do you draw at any time when you are in the right mood for it?

Youssef: I usually draw in the evening more than in the morning. There are other times that are best to me for developing my art and for exploring nature and seeing the beauty in it that can motivate me to draw with a clear soul. Also, I think as artists it is important to observe ugly things around us so we can cultivate our analytical thinking and shape our values about life. The philosophers who have studied aesthetics tie art and morality together.

VoD: Do you always paint with an

expressionist style or do you do abstract as well?

Youssef: I don't do abstract painting. This kind of painting is not so common in Darfur because it is not much liked by the people here, so artists have developed other painting styles that are locally accepted.

VoD: How would you describe your style of painting and what you're trying to accomplish in each work?

Youssef: I mostly use a primitivism style of painting, and in some paintings I use both primitivism and expressionism. What I try to accomplish through my work is promoting old Darfuri culture and the social traditions that were used by the older generations. I also try to draw attention to the natural world around us. I typically rely on materials and colours that are made from natural sources, such as tar and natural glue.

Artist Buhery Mohammed Youssef shows his paintings, hung in his studio in El Geneina, West Darfur. Photo by Albert González Farran.





A painting created by El Geneina artist Buhery Mohammed Youssef, whose art focuses mostly on nature and local traditions.

VoD: And how would you characterise your art in the history of art in Darfur and abroad?

Youssef: My style, in terms of art history, is not so commonly used in Darfur. It's much more likely to be found abroad. Yet in Darfur's history there are many renowned painters who have relied on this style. I had the honour to learn from some of them.

VoD: Is nature your main source of inspiration?

Youssef: Mostly yes and also tradi-

“Peace needs financial support as well as moral support; hopefully all this will be achieved soon and Darfur will be back to being a peaceful area once again.”

tions and some activities in our culture, and sometimes other art can inspire me. Even a primitive drawing or a simple design done by an artisan can inspire me. At other times, I have been inspired by the sophisticated work of international artists and designers.

VoD: In Darfur, does the price of a painting depend on the name of the artist, like in most other countries?

Youssef: Actually, the price of a painting here depends a lot on its quality and whether someone likes it, regardless of the fame of the artist.

VoD: Since children start drawing at an early age, do you think drawing is an instinctual activity that human beings have naturally?

Youssef: Children draw as part of play, but having real talent for drawing is something else. Drawing properly requires basic, and of course the skill that develops with practice.

VoD: Some famous artists in history never studied art, but they still produce outstanding work. Does that mean the academic study of art is not

important as long as the artist has real talent?

Youssef: Van Gogh and some other classic artists in history are exceptional cases. In general, academic study and overall education are quite important for an artist in producing good art. Without education, their work and opinions about art would be shallow, and would be lacking more sophisticated principles of evaluation.

VoD: Is there a centre in El Geneina that supports local artists and exhibits their art for free?

Youssef: Unfortunately, there isn't any centre in El Geneina where artists can exhibit their art. The same can be said of the situation across Darfur. There might be few centres here and there, but Darfuri artists need more support than that.

VoD: Do you have ideas about how to really help local artists?

Youssef: There must be more centres designed to support artists in each state. The centres could provide a hall as a gallery for displaying paintings and other kinds of fine art. This would be useful not only for the artists but also for beginners and university students. Exhibitions in such galleries could be changed every week or every two weeks so new artists could display their work. Also, the centres could provide a platform for educators to talk about art to students and beginners.

VoD: Besides painting, do you do other kind of activities related to art?

Youssef: Yes, I design logos and three dimensional signs. I also do commercial interiors and do workshops as well. I designed logos for various cultural festivals in El Geneina and Andoka. As for workshops, I participated with the United Nations Development Programme and with the United Nations Children's Fund in workshops on condemning violence against women. Another workshop was for raising awareness on art, and another one on combating HIV/AIDS in cooperation with the "Rashid Diyaab" centre.

VoD: In your opinion, do Darfuri artists play an important role in promoting peace?

Youssef: Yes, many of them have such roles because they raise awareness among the people of Darfur about peace concepts in different art forms, including traditional art, and through various cultural activities that promote peace among Darfuris. But peace needs financial support as well as moral support; hopefully all this will be achieved soon and Darfur will be back to being a peaceful area once again.

VoD: What message would like to deliver to Darfuris?

Youssef: I would like to tell all Darfuris to reject war and discrimination and to be like they were in the past, living in peaceful coexistence with each other in our beloved land. ■

On 14 November 2012, artist Buhery Mohammed Youssef paints in his studio, which also serves as a gallery, in El Geneina, West Darfur. Photo by Albert González Farran.





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