

UNAMID's publication for the people of Darfur

VOICES

of Darfur

MARCH 2013

Darfur's Peace Chants

An Interview with Mahasin
Osman Altahir

**A Conversation with
UNAMID's Acting Chief**

*Aichatou Mindaoudou
on the way forward*

**Touching the Lives of
Darfur's Street Children**

*Struggling to meet their
educational needs*

**Working Toward
Women's Rights in Darfur**

*Gender Chief's views on
challenges, progress*



AFRICAN UNION - UNITED NATIONS
MISSION IN DARFUR
(UNAMID)



On 24 February 2013 in El Fasher, North Darfur, Fatima Abdullah Khalil (left) and Mahasin Osman Altahir (right), pose for a photo. They are hakamas, women who influence social change through chanting poetry and song. Photo by Sojoud Elgarrai, UNAMID.

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In an interview conducted in El Fasher, *Voices of Darfur* talked with Mahasin Osman Altahir, a well-known hakama, who chants for peace, peaceful coexistence and reconstruction in Darfur.

EDITOR'S NOTE

I'm pleased to introduce the March 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 Acting Chief. In the interview, Acting Joint Special Representative and Joint Chief Mediator *a.i.* Aichatou Mindaoudou talks about several of the objectives she has been working to achieve since taking on the role of UNAMID's Acting Head on 1 August 2012. Mr. Emadeldin Rijal conducted the second interview, our cover feature, with Mahasin Osman Altahir. In the interview, Ms. Altahir talks with *Voices* about the role of the Hakamas in Darfur, and shares her thoughts on the impact of her art on Darfur's social fabric.

In "Many People, Few Resources: Doctors and Their Patients," Mr. Albert González Farran presents a photo essay that highlights the challenges of medical professionals in Darfur, a region of Sudan that is lacking fully developed infrastructure and where medical supplies are scarce. The photo essay is a tribute to the patients who need care and especially the doctors and nurses attending to them, struggling with limited resources to care for their clients' medical needs and treat them with the dignity and respect they deserve.

In the viewpoint published in this issue, Ms. Yegeerawork Angagaw, the Chief of UNAMID's Gender Advisory Unit, offers her thoughts about commemorating International Women's Day in Darfur, and points out that, while more women are engaging in the peace process here, there is still a long way to go. Ms. Angagaw argues that, despite many challenges, UNAMID is making progress in working with every segment of Darfur society, from local communities to Government institutions, to mobilize support for the women of Darfur.

In "Touching the Lives of Darfuri Street Children," Ms. Sharon Lukunka writes about the plight of street kids in Darfur. Ten years of Darfur's conflict have resulted in hundreds of thousands of people displaced from their home areas with no means of making a living, an infrastructure that is in disrepair, and an education system that lacks basic services. Against this backdrop, Darfur is struggling to meet the needs of its street children.

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



On 24 February 2013 in El Fasher, North Darfur, Mahasin Osman Altahir, pictured here, proclaims herself to be among the best of North Darfur's hakamas, women who influence social change through chanting. Photo by Sojoud Elgarrai, UNAMID.



On 3 March 2013, a member of the Boy Scouts and Girl Guides from El Fasher, North Darfur, performs a traditional dance during the opening ceremony of the graduation programme at El Fasher University. Photo by Albert González Farran, UNAMID.

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UNAMID Delivers Critical Aid to North Darfur Displaced

BY CHRIS CYCMANICK AND RANIA ABDULRAHMAN



On 19 January 2013, UNAMID delivers humanitarian aid to thousands of civilians who were displaced in El Sereif, North Darfur, as a result of tribal clashes. Photo by Sojoud Elgarrai, UNAMID.

From 17 to 22 January, UNAMID delivered more than 56,000 kilograms of urgent humanitarian aid, by land and air, to thousands of civilians who were displaced in

the North Darfur villages of Saraf Omra, Kabkabya, El Sereif and Abu Gamra.

The aid, provided by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the UN Children's Fund, the UN Office for Project Services and the UN Refugee Agency, consisted of nonfood items such as plastic tarps, sleeping mats, blankets and water-purification equipment.

In addition to providing a full spectrum of logistics support to deliver the aid, the Mission provided security escorts to humanitarian workers, enabling them to carry out their duties, and has been supporting mediation efforts to reduce the tensions in Jebel Amir.

"The operation marks a sig-

nificant step forward for UNAMID and its partners," said UNAMID Acting Joint Special Representative and Joint Chief Mediator *a.i.* Aichatou Mindaoudou. "We have witnessed a great amount of cooperation between all stakeholders, at all levels, which has ensured that access to those in need would be granted quickly."

The humanitarian situation in North Darfur emerged earlier in January as a result of clashes between the Ab-bala and Beni Hussein tribes over gold mines in the Jebel Amir area, resulting in a mass displacement of tens of thousands of people and more than 100 killed, according to Government figures. ■

UNAMID Sponsors Education Projects in Central Darfur

BY RANIA ABDULRAHMAN

On 8 January, in the Central Darfur capital of Zalingei, hundreds of men, women and children took part in a ceremony to inaugurate three quick-impact projects (QIPs) implemented by UNAMID peacekeepers. The projects, designed to improve the facilities at El Salaam Basic School and El Zahra Secondary School for girls, represent the most recent effort in UNAMID's ongoing work to support local educational systems across Darfur to create an environment conducive to learning.

UNAMID Acting Joint Special Representative and Joint Chief Mediator *a.i.* Aichatou Mindaoudou officially launched the QIPs, which

included the construction of four classrooms and latrines, the provision of school furniture and stationery at El Salam Basic School, and the construction of a security wall around the El Zahra Secondary School.

During a speech delivered at the ceremony, held at El Zahra School, Ms. Mindaoudou explained that QIPs are small-scale projects designed to benefit local communities. "These schools, and the QIPs which brought them into being, are not the total of what UNAMID does in Darfur, but they do reflect the best of what UNAMID is intended to achieve," said the Acting JSR.

The three QIPs were a result of consultations with



On 8 January 2013, UNAMID Acting JSR Aichatou Mindaoudou visits Al Salaam Basic School in Zalingei, Central Darfur, and presents school supplies to the school's principal. Photo by Rania Abdulrahman, UNAMID.

communities and local authorities, particularly the Commissioner of Zalingei and the

State Ministry of Education. During the discussions, the parties committed to support-

ing both schools and ensuring that the communities have the resources to maintain the facilities.

“Communities throughout Darfur are coming together, just as you have done, to make decisions about what would best help their communities develop,” said Ms. Mindaoudou. “With the wide variety of QIPs proposals, we see it is clear that Darfuris are invested in laying their own foundation for a peaceful and prosperous future.”

Since 2007, UNAMID has worked closely with communities and with nongovernmental organizations to address the basic issues that have led to the conflict in Darfur and to provide ways to improve the living conditions of the people in the region. As a result, in Central Darfur alone, 66 QIPs have been implemented in the areas of education, health, water, women’s development and rule of law. ■

UNAMID Acting Chief Speaks at DRA Council Inauguration

BY KONE MOUROULAYE



On 16 January, UNAMID Acting JSR Aichatou Mindaoudou addresses the audience gathered for the inauguration of the Darfur Regional Authority Council in Nyala, South Darfur. Photo by Kone Mouroulaye.

In a speech delivered on 16 January, UNAMID Acting Joint Special Representative and Joint Chief Mediator *a.i.* Aichatou Mindaoudou addressed the audience gathered for the inauguration of the Darfur Regional Authority (DRA) Council in Nyala, South Darfur, saying that the event marked an important milestone in the implementation of the Doha Document for Peace in Darfur (DDPD).

Ms. Mindaoudou noted that the formation of the

Council completes the establishment of the DRA as the primary mechanism not only for the implementation of DDPD provisions, but also for coordinating with the relevant Government entities on recovery and reconstruction efforts in Darfur.

The DRA Council has supervisory, monitoring and organizational responsibilities and is specifically mandated to examine laws and recommend legislative measures that would promote coordination and cooperation among the

Darfur states, evaluate the performance of the Regional Authority, approve its budget and ensure proper spending and accountability.

“I urge you all to do your utmost to deliver these public responsibilities and, by so doing, justify the confidence reposed in you,” she said. “I call on the Government to empower and adequately fund both the Executive Council and the Council of the DRA for them to be able to function fully and effectively.”

The DRA Chair, Dr. Tigani Seisiv, said that the inauguration of the Council represents a step toward stability and development. He praised the efforts of Qatar and UNAMID, as key DRA partners in supporting activities designed to foster peace. Dr. Seisi urged the Government of Sudan to fulfil its commitment toward the DDPD. ■

Zalingei, Central Darfur



On 1 February 2013, UNAMID organized a horse race as part of the Mission’s ongoing outreach activities to promote peace in the region. Thousands of people attended the event. Photo by Inaju Inaju, UNAMID.

El Fasher, North Darfur



On 10 January 2013, students from the School for Mentally Disabled perform a song to showcase their talents and commemorate the International Day for People with Disabilities in a ceremony facilitated by UNAMID. Photo by Sojoud Elgarrai, UNAMID.

UNAMID Airlifts North Darfur Wounded, Strengthens Presence in Area

BY RANIA ABDULRAHMAN

On 24 February 2013 in North Darfur, UNAMID airlifted 37 wounded civilians, including one woman and two children, from the El Sereif locality to El Fasher for medical treatment. In addition, the Mission transported 2,700 kilograms of medical and other supplies to the victims of El Sereif as part of its ongoing efforts to address the needs of civilians affected in the North Darfur tribal clashes.

On 21 February, UNAMID received information about a resumption of fighting between the Beni Hussein and Abbala tribes in the Aji Heir area, approximately 10 kilometres west of El Sereif. The fighting reached the vicinity of the El Sereif town

on 23 February.

UNAMID immediately activated its protection of civilians plan to respond to the reports of violence by deploying peacekeepers to establish a temporary operating base to secure the area and to facilitate the work of humanitarian organizations.

The humanitarian situation in the El Sereif locality and in North Darfur followed from an outbreak of violence that took place on 5 January 2013 between the Abbala and Beni Hussein tribes in the Jebel Amir area of North Darfur, resulting in a mass displacement of more than 100,000 people.

The Mission has been supporting reconciliation initiatives between the two sides,



On 24 February 2013 in North Darfur, UNAMID airlifted 37 wounded civilians from the El Sereif locality to El Fasher for medical treatment. Photo by Rania Abdulrahman, UNAMID.

conducting security escorts to facilitate humanitarian access, and significantly increasing the number of daily patrols in the North Darfur areas most affected by the violence. ■

Arms Registration Begins in West Darfur

BY CATERINA VIOLANTE AND CHRIS CYCMANICK

The first registration and marking of civilian arms in West Darfur officially began on 30 January 2013 in the state capital of El Geneina. During the next six months, with the goal of curbing the proliferation of arms and reducing violence in the area, the Government of Sudan expects to register approximately 30,000 weapons.

The two-day event, organized by the Ministry of Interior, the Sudan Disarmament Demobilization and Reintegration Commission and the Bonn International Centre for Conversion, brought together nearly 200 participants from governmental bodies, the diplomatic community, native administration unions, and nongovernmental organi-

zations, to mobilize support to register and mark small arms. In a symbolic gesture, 10 local leaders, each representing a different tribe, were among the first to register arms.

The inauguration ceremony, presided over by Sudanese Interior Minister Ibrahim Mahmoud Hamed and West Darfur Wali (Governor) Hayder Galoucome, followed a one-day workshop designed to inform international and national stakeholders about the arms-registration initiative and to enhance coordination to ensure success. Despite the process of registering and marking being voluntary, all arms not licensed after six months—subject to extension—will be



On 30 January 2013, the first registration and marking of civilian arms in West Darfur takes place in El Geneina. The initiative is designed to curb the proliferation of arms and reduce violence in the area. Photo by Caterina Violante, UNAMID.

considered illegal.

The United Nations Development Programme and

UNAMID provided technical and logistical support to the event. ■

Nyala, South Darfur



On 30 January 2013, UNAMID Joint Special Representative (Designate) Mohamed Ibn Chambas arrives at UNAMID headquarters in El Fasher, then travels to all five Darfur states to meet UNAMID staff stationed in the sectors. Photo by Sojoud Elgarrai, UNAMID.

El Sereif, North Darfur



On 24 February 2013, UNAMID transported 2,700 kilograms of medical and other supplies to the victims of El Sereif as part of its ongoing efforts to address the needs of civilians affected in the North Darfur tribal clashes. Photo by Rania Abdulrahman, UNAMID.

Sudan and Darfur Rebel Group Sign Ceasefire Agreement

BY UN NEWS CENTRE STAFF



On 10 February 2013, the Government of Sudan and the Mohamed Bashir faction of the Justice and Equality Movement, one of the major armed movements in Darfur, sign a ceasefire agreement. Photo UNAMID.

The Government of Sudan and the Mohamed Bashir faction of the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM), one of the major armed movements in Darfur, signed a ceasefire agreement

to move the peace process forward, the African Union - United Nations mediator announced on 11 February.

“This is a major breakthrough in the road toward a comprehensive and lasting

peace accord in Darfur,” said Aichatou Mindaoudou, who is also UNAMID’s Acting Joint Special Representative.

The Government, represented by State Minister and Head of the Darfur Follow-up Office, Amin Hassan Omer, signed the ceasefire with Arko Sulaiman Dahiya, Vice Chair and Head of the Delegation from JEM, on 10 February in Doha, Qatar. The agreement lays the groundwork to start negotiations on other substantive issues, such as power- and wealth-sharing and the return of internally displaced people and refugees.

The negotiations for the ceasefire began last month in Qatar under the parameters stipulated in the Doha Document for Peace in Darfur (DDPD). The DDPD forms the basis for a permanent

ceasefire and comprehensive peace agreement to end the fighting that began in Darfur 10 years ago, pitting government forces and allied militias against rebel groups.

JEM is the second armed movement to commit to the DDPD after the Liberation and Justice Movement (LJM) signed it last year. Following the signing, Ms. Mindaoudou congratulated both parties and said she hoped that the agreement would attract the non-signatory movements to join in the peace process.

“The road to peace is challenging and needs a great deal of resolve, perseverance and concessions from both sides,” said Ms. Mindaoudou, who reiterated her commitment to work with the parties to the conflict to achieving a comprehensive peace in Darfur. ■

Aichatou Mindaoudou: 'Peace Will Prevail in the End'

In February 2013, *Voices of Darfur* talked with Aichatou Mindaoudou about several of the objectives she has been working to achieve as UNAMID's Acting Joint Special Representative and Joint Chief Mediator *a.i.*

BY KIRK L. KROEKER



On 16 December 2012 in Darma, North Darfur, Acting Joint Special Representative Aichatou Mindaoudou meets General Mohamed Bashir and other leaders of the Justice and Equality Movement - Sudan. Photo by Albert González Farran, UNAMID.

Ten years ago, news of Darfur saturated the international media as fighting between tribal militias, rebel groups and Sudanese forces claimed thousands of lives. The majority were innocent Darfuris. Since those difficult days, the picture on the ground has changed, helped in part by UNAMID. With more than 25,000 military, police and civilian staff, UNAMID is the largest international peace-keeping force in the world.

In 2008, when the mission deployed following its formal establishment in

2007, reports indicated thousands were killed annually in ongoing fighting. In the following years, those numbers began to fall. However, during 2012, the gains of previous years were jeopardized. Violence in some parts of Darfur escalated, presenting a challenge for the people of Darfur, the international community and the Government of Sudan.

As ever, the chief victims in such conflicts are Darfur's civilians. While peace in Darfur is in the interest of all—including Sudan and, above all, the long-

suffering people of Darfur—UNAMID has been faced with significant challenges in working toward its mandate-driven objectives of protecting civilians, facilitating humanitarian assistance and supporting the peace process.

In February 2013, *Voices of Darfur* talked with Acting Joint Special Representative and Joint Chief Mediator *a.i.* Aichatou Mindaoudou to hear more about her strategic perspective on these challenges and to get an inside look at some of the transformative develop-

ments she has been working to achieve since assuming her role as UNAMID's Acting Head on 1 August 2012.

Voices of Darfur: Thank you for taking the time to talk with us today. First, can you tell us a bit about your background and how your prior work has given you perhaps a unique perspective in leading the world's largest peacekeeping mission?

Mindaoudou: Thank you for this opportunity to speak to you today about some of the most pressing issues UNAMID has been facing under my watch.

In terms of my background, my most recent role prior to joining UNAMID was Minister for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation in Niger, where I worked for more than 10 years. This was a job that involved diplomatic practice, high-level negotiations and mediation for conflict resolution. It also involved building consensus and partnerships, as well as forging alliances on issues of common interest. To be specific, I was involved in several mediation and conflict-resolution processes, particularly in West African countries, including Cote D'Ivoire, Togo, Guinea Bissau and Niger. I also served as Niger's Minister for Social Development, Population and Promotion of Women's Rights.

All this, coupled with my education background—I have a Ph.D. in International Law and was a professor of International Law—and my service as a member of nongovernmental organizations and civil society groups that worked to promote human rights, women's rights and rule of law, have been very useful in my present work as Acting Joint Special Representative and Joint Chief Mediator. In summary, I can say that my past experience has given me insight into the current challenges I face in my daily responsibilities, particularly in light of the realities here that affect the work of the Mission in protecting civilians, undertaking mediation initiatives and facilitating humanitarian access, all in the interest of

“The adoption of the Doha Document for Peace in Darfur represents an important milestone in efforts to resolve the Darfur conflict. The agreement provides a unique opportunity for a new beginning in Darfur.”

advancing the peace process.

Because of the ongoing work, and the sometimes frenetic pace of the negotiations and other events inside Darfur and abroad, much of my time is taken up with both mediation efforts and the implementation of UNAMID's core mandate to protect civilians throughout Darfur. So it is good to be able to be with you today and discuss some of the major issues the Mission has been facing and no doubt will continue to face.

VoD: UNAMID's critics tend to ignore the complexities of the situation on the ground, including intertribal conflict, the extreme competition over natural resources and, perhaps most importantly, the absence of a fully comprehensive peace agreement that would offer a way forward for Darfur. What are your thoughts about UNAMID operating without a comprehensive peace agreement in place?

Mindaoudou: UNAMID deployed in 2008 as the largest and most expensive peacekeeping mission. Not only was it the first hybrid peacekeeping operation; it also was the first peacekeeping mission operating with no comprehensive or all-inclusive peace agreement in place.

The Darfur Peace Agreement of 2006, on the basis of which UNAMID was deployed, was not inclusive. The mandate of the Mission therefore included support for ongoing efforts to achieve a comprehensive political settlement of the Darfur conflict; efforts that are now anchored in the African Union and United Nations Framework for Peace in Darfur, which laid the foundation for our strategy to deal with the exigencies of running the Mission without

a comprehensive peace agreement.

The first pillar of the strategy focuses on supporting the implementation of the Doha Document for Peace in Darfur. As it stands, the DDPD addresses the basic needs of ordinary Darfuris—peace, power sharing, equal access to resources, justice and reconciliation, human rights and the pursuit of a better livelihood. To raise awareness of the agreement and foster additional buy-in from those movements that initially declined to sign it, UNAMID provided logistical and technical support to more than 140 dissemination workshops held across Darfur and in Khartoum. More than 25,000 people attended the workshops to learn about the DDPD, and to deliberate about the many provisions it stipulates and that ultimately will benefit ordinary Darfuris.

Although there are delays, notable progress has been made in the DDPD's implementation. UNAMID is providing technical assistance and logistics support to the Darfur Regional Authority. The Ceasefire Commission, designed to implement the final security arrangement, is chaired by UNAMID's Force Commander. In addition, the Joint Commission, a body that deals with issues referred to it by the Ceasefire Commission, was inaugurated on December 2011. The Implementation Follow-up Commission, charged with overseeing the implementation of the DDPD, is now in motion.

Other key mechanisms stipulated in the DDPD are pointing to hope and progress. Dr. Tigani Seisi was appointed as Chair of the Darfur Regional Authority in September 2011; a Special Prosecutor and the Judges of the Special Court for



On 9 August 2012 in Kutum, North Darfur, women from the Kassab camp for internally displaced people wait to receive medical attention from an emergency clinic set up by UNAMID, the World Health Organization and North Darfur's Ministry of Health. Residents of the Kassab camp were forced to flee their homes following a series of violent attacks in the area, displacing those already displaced. Photo by Albert González Farran, UNAMID.

Darfur were appointed in January 2012; the National Commission for Human Rights was established with members appointed by Presidential Decree in January 2012; and the Darfur Regional Authority Council, which will steer the DRA, was formally inaugurated in January 2013.

These developments indicate a serious commitment by the DDPD signatories to adhere to the agreement, as these items form the essential institutional framework needed to implement the DDPD and create a culture of peace. The Document represents an important step forward in the Darfur peace process, which UNAMID has supported from the beginning and on which I have continued to work as Acting Joint Special Representative and Joint Chief Mediator.

VoD: Due to problems in force generation and deployment, UNAMID experienced an unusually long start-up

phase, during which it was not in a position to fully implement its protection mandate. As a result, the Mission's reputation suffered. What have you done to reinvigorate UNAMID's strategies related to civilian protection? And how is UNAMID working to improve the security situation?

Mindaoudou: It is true that, at the beginning, UNAMID experienced some difficulties. We have certainly faced some significant challenges, especially in terms of positioning required equipment for the troops in the field, but I am happy to say that we are relentlessly working to address these challenges and we are achieving some results thanks to the cooperation of the troop- and police-contributing countries and with the support of the United Nations and the African Union. The Mission has been able to contribute to the protection of civilians in Darfur in several key ways.

On a basic level, the presence of the Mission itself is a contributor to stability and serves as a deterrent to violence, as civilian, police and military personnel are deployed throughout Darfur. In 2010, UNAMID implemented a new patrol strategy that increased the number of active patrols each day. The 24-hour-patrol strategy extends to the deep field and includes patrols for civilians even in their day-to-day activities of collecting firewood, water and grass.

Although hostilities continue in some areas of Darfur due to tribal clashes, criminal elements and confrontation between armed movements and the Government, the numbers of people affected by violence decreased each year between 2008 and 2011. In response to the increase in the number and severity of incidents of violence across Darfur in 2012, we revised and updated our protection of civilians strategy. It is now multidimensional and community-based, with a revamped early-warning mechanism designed to address the needs of populations under threats by reaching them quickly through the rapid formation of response teams.

These Darfur-wide mechanisms are designed to strengthen UNAMID's ability to prevent violence, to address emerging situations proactively and to react to humanitarian and protection needs with greater efficacy. It is this multidimensional approach that combines physical protection measures, political engagements and the establishment of a protective environment that enabled UNAMID and its partners to address and continue to respond to the recent Jebel Amir crisis in North Darfur in a more coordinated, harmonized and comprehensive manner with the effective cooperation of the Government of Sudan, the movements and concerned communities in the affected areas.

While the primary responsibility to protect civilians in Darfur of course rests with the Government of Sudan, UNAMID complements that work. Our revamped protection strategy includes an increase in the number of daily patrols; the deployment of civilian staff to critical areas; closer cooperation with internally displaced people and their lead-

“In response to the increase in the number and severity of incidents of violence across Darfur in 2012, we have revised and updated our protection of civilians strategy. It is now multidimensional and community-based.”

ers; closer coordination at the grassroots level with state and federal government bodies; and the development of robust reporting mechanisms on sexual violence and children in armed conflicts.

I am confident that our current efforts related to refining and tuning our protection strategies will go a long way toward more rapidly responding to reports of violence and displacement, and to more quickly facilitating the delivery of humanitarian assistance where it is needed most.

VoD: One of the challenges you have been addressing as you have been revamping UNAMID's protection strategy is restricted access, especially to certain areas where UNAMID has sent integrated assessment teams to observe, report and respond to the critical needs of newly displaced people. Could you share your thoughts on the possible way forward vis-à-vis these access restrictions?

Mindaoudou: Since the Mission's inception, UNAMID has been working in a challenging social and political climate. Access restrictions, cited regularly in the Secretary-General's quarterly reports to the Security Council and raised continuously to the local authorities and the central Government, have affected our work in several crucial ways, especially in terms of the many Darfuris who remain in need of humanitarian assistance, and also in terms of the many reports of outbreaks of violence that we are unable to verify directly.

However, it is crucial to point out that, while these operational limitations remain an issue, we have made some headway in working with the Government of Sudan at both the local and the central levels. We have negotiated access to several critical areas, and we have continued to engage the Government and movements for greater access to conflict areas so we can facilitate much-needed aid to the Darfuris who need it.

Let me offer some additional clarification on this point. The Government of Sudan of course has the primary responsibility for the security of the people of Darfur and indeed for all expatriate civilian staff working in Darfur. According to the Status of Forces Agreement,



On 12 August 2012 in Kutum, North Darfur, UNAMID peacekeepers deliver nearly 100 boxes of medical supplies to the Kutum Rural Hospital following a series of violent incidents that began on 1 August and resulted in those living in the Kassab camp for displaced people to flee their homes and seek refuge in Kutum. Photo by Albert González Farran, UNAMID.

we don't need clearance from the Government of Sudan for our movements in Darfur; we notify Sudanese authorities of our planned movements. In certain scenarios, particularly in times of clashes between the Government and rebel groups, Sudanese forces have denied passage to our patrols or assessment teams. But it is a misinterpretation when people say we need clearance from Sudanese authorities for our movements.

We certainly do need to coordinate our movements. We are here because we have a Status of Forces Agreement that gives us access to all parts of Darfur. In general, we don't move without coordinating with the Government, as well as with the armed movements operating in the areas we visit. So the matter comes down to coordination, not permission. We are here in agreement with the Sudanese Government to undertake a specific mandate known to everyone.

Meanwhile, UNAMID has supported and will continue to support the

efforts of UN agencies and other aid actors by providing security escorts to facilitate the delivery of aid and also by doing what we can to directly help Darfuris in need. In 2009, for example, when more than 10,000 civilians gathered in Muhajariya, South Darfur, in search of safety, we facilitated critical humanitarian assistance through our team site there. In 2010, in the Zam Zam camp for internally displaced people in North Darfur, when there was an acute shortage of water, we provided water to 10,000 people.

We have provided similar assistance in many other locations, such as in 2011 in Shangil Tobaya, North Darfur, and Khor Abeche, South Darfur. Also in 2011, our Operation Spring Basket opened humanitarian access to areas of Darfur that had historically been closed due to these access restrictions.

There are countless other examples of UNAMID facilitating humanitarian assistance. In late 2012, for example, the Mission worked with national and in-

“It is my highest hope that the Doha Donor Conference will be a great success and will inject much-needed funds into Darfur's reconstruction and development projects.”

ternational partners to help combat the spread of yellow fever in Darfur by airlifting vaccines and several hundred tons of medical supplies to affected populations. And recently, following the mass displacement of thousands of civilians as a result of tribal clashes in the Jebel Amir area in January 2013, we facilitated the delivery of humanitarian aid to the areas of Saraf Omra, Kabkabya, El Sereif and Abu Gamra.

While issues related to access and restrictions of movements have become an operational reality that we deal with from time to time, we are not deterred from fulfilling our mandate to protect civilians and facilitate the delivery of humanitarian assistance. We will continue to coordinate with the Government on our movements, just as we will continue to press for greater access to areas from which we are receiving reports of civilians in need of aid.

VoD: One of the major issues in Darfur is intertribal conflict, whether over resources or due to historic rivalries. UNAMID has been working with communities to facilitate reconciliation and mediation activities. What are your thoughts about this ongoing work and its impact on the root causes of the conflict?

Mindaoudou: According to the Security Council Resolution 2063 of July 2012, UNAMID's mandate includes support for and promotion of reconciliation and local mediation. We are undertaking these activities through our Civil Affairs section. As part of our efforts to support reconciliation, we have been addressing all kinds of inter- and intra-tribal conflicts in mediation activities that directly relate to the root causes of the conflict here. Our local-level mediation initiatives are designed to restore a sense of trust and establish peaceful coexistence between tribes.

UNAMID has directly mediated several conflicts involving different ethnic communities, and has facilitated reconciliation meetings and provided support to develop many local agreements. In addition, we have conducted numerous training sessions to build the capabilities of Darfur's community leaders in negotiating and resolving conflict.



On 24 February 2013 in North Darfur, UNAMID airlifted 37 wounded civilians, including one woman and two children, from the El Sereif locality to El Fasher for medical treatment. In addition, the Mission transported 2,700 kilograms of medical and other supplies to the victims of El Sereif as part of its ongoing efforts to address the needs of civilians affected in the North Darfur tribal clashes. Photo by Rania Abdulrahman, UNAMID.

We have conducted workshops, held meetings and facilitated events across Darfur to promote a culture of peace at the community level.

We have worked directly with civil society groups, women's groups, youth groups and leaders in camps for displaced people, encouraging them to participate in reconciliation initiatives at local and regional levels. It is fair to say that we have made significant progress in these areas since the Mission's inception. I can point to many examples now where local reconciliation initiatives are being spearheaded, once again, by community leaders and groups themselves. This is a positive sign and signals hope for the future.

UNAMID's Darfur-Darfur Dialogue and Consultation section is working to reinstate traditional conflict-resolution and mediation mechanisms, such as *Ajameed* and *Judyia*, across Darfur, as an alternative to seeking justice in the overburdened Darfuri court system. The reinvigorated interest in these time-tested techniques is helping communities resolve disputes, such as access to water points, at the local level rather than through the courts.

One example of a renewed sense of solidarity among tribes in Darfur can

be found in El Daein, the capital of the new state of East Darfur, where there are more than 30 different tribes living together in close proximity because of displacements in the area. These people are living peacefully together. Clashes between these groups over the control of land and other natural resources led to violence in the past. But now these tribes are resolving their disputes by relying on dialogue rather than weapons.

VoD: Related to these local conflict-resolution efforts is of course the issue of returnees. Given that the land of some internally displaced people is now occupied, making even more complex an already complex situation, what are your thoughts about returnees? What is UNAMID doing to facilitate returns?

Mindaoudou: It is worth noting that, despite the recent escalation of violence in some parts of Darfur, internally displaced people and refugees continue to return, thanks to the more stable and secure environment in other parts of Darfur. In 2011 and 2012, UN agencies verified the return of 250,000 internally displaced people and refugees. In Darfur, approximately 3.5 million people currently receive food aid, including some 1.4 million in camps for

displaced people.

It is equally worth noting that, despite the abundance of press reports about the outbreak of violence in North Darfur, an improved security situation across much of Darfur has directly led to a downward trend in the number of newly displaced people. For instance, in the course of 2012, humanitarian agencies estimated that around 90,000 Darfuris fled their homes, which represents a decrease in comparison to previous years.

UNAMID continues to provide security escorts during return-monitoring missions and also is active in patrolling return areas. And, as I mentioned earlier, we are deeply involved in the much less visible aspects of the issue of returnees, in terms of local mediation efforts. I recognize that there is much work to be done when it comes to returnees, and I want to stress that we are absolutely committed to this issue, at every level, despite the abundant problems and the complexities of the situation.

Let me go back to the example from East Darfur. Since they arrived in East Darfur, residents of the Al Neem camp for displaced people 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,

“UNAMID has supported and will continue to support the efforts of UN agencies and other aid actors by providing security escorts to facilitate the delivery of aid and also by doing what we can to directly help Darfuris in need.”

but they have had a longstanding agreement with the Rezeigat to farm the lands. However, during their displacement, the Rezeigat loaned the land to others. Some tribes in Al Neem are committed to reactivating their original agreement with the Rezeigat to move back to the area. Talks, facilitated by UNAMID, have been going on to develop a possible solution, with one idea being for the new occupants and the returnees to share the land.

This example is not unlike many others I could cite. The claims to land are complex and delicate, and UNAMID has been supporting efforts through workshops and other dialogue initiatives to encourage all concerned parties to come to the negotiation table and facilitate returns. But the situation, which is already complex, is made significantly more difficult by security incidents that continue to make some parts of Darfur unsafe for those who are internally displaced to re-

turn to their desired home areas.

VoD: On a larger scale, and in your capacity as Joint Chief Mediator, you have been working on political reconciliation to bring those armed movements to the table who have not yet signed the Doha Document for Peace in Darfur. Can you talk about the efforts you’ve made in this area?

Mindaoudou: As you know, despite significant progress, the peace process is still not comprehensive. This will be a continuing challenge until all the parties to the conflict are brought on board and sign the DDPD. In this regard, I have been working in close collaboration with members of the international community, particularly those who sit on the DDPD’s Implementation Follow-up Commission, to convince the non-signatory movements and the Government of Sudan to cease hostilities and resume dialogue in the interest of peace and the people of Darfur.

To encourage the holdout movements to reject violence and join the peace process, UNAMID continues to serve in a mediation capacity, and I have been very active as Joint Chief Mediator. With the combined efforts of the State of Qatar, Chad and other regional and international partners, we have been able to bring the Government of Sudan and the Justice and Equality Movement, under the leadership of Mohamed Bashir, to agree to resume negotiations in Doha on the basis of the DDPD.

They signed a ceasefire agreement on 10 February and are currently holding talks on all substantive issues related to human rights and fundamental freedoms, justice and reconciliation, power sharing, wealth sharing, compensation, final security arrangements, and the return of internally displaced people and refugees. These discussions, which have significantly progressed, are expected to

On 30 May 2012, Ms. Aichatou Mindaoudou, then serving as UNAMID’s Deputy Joint Special Representative - Political, is welcomed by the community of Forog, North Darfur, just prior to the official opening of a new medical clinic built as one of UNAMID’s quick-impact projects. In addition to building the clinic, the Mission sponsored the construction of three new schools in the area. Photo by Albert González Farran, UNAMID.



lead to the adoption of the DDPD.

The support of the international community, particularly member states, has been and will remain crucial in this regard, until we achieve the desired objectives as set out in the various relevant United Nations Security Council Resolutions and the African Union Peace and Security Council Communiqués. I would like to use this opportunity to echo the call by the international community—especially by the United Nations Security Council and the African Union Peace and Security Council—to the non-signatory movements to join the peace process on the basis of the DDPD, and to the Government of Sudan to show flexibility in negotiating with them a comprehensive political settlement.

The entire people of Darfur, most notably the displaced people and refugees living in camps, and other victims of the conflict, have also been repeatedly urging all belligerent parties to reject violence and commit to dialogue, as there is no military solution to the conflict. They are tired of this situation of insecurity and impoverishment and are demanding a change for the better.

VoD: With so many conflicts emerging around the world, in Syria and Mali, for example, Darfur no longer occupies the spotlight in the international media that it once held. What is your sense about the international community's interest in Darfur, particularly as we move toward the Doha Donor Conference, which has the capacity to inject much-needed resources into Darfur?

Mindaoudou: Darfur has not completely fallen off the radar of the international media. It shouldn't for many reasons. As I mentioned earlier in this interview, the international community remains resolutely committed to the collective efforts to end the conflict and support economic recovery, reconstruction and development in Darfur. This commitment is manifest not only in the various Resolutions and Communiqués of the United Nations Security Council and the African Union Peace and Security Council, respectively, but also in the more concrete work that UNAMID is conducting



On 20 November 2012 in Nertiti, Central Darfur, women celebrate the official opening of a new Women's Market, a building where local women now sell their products, mostly vegetables, while being sheltered from the desert heat. UNAMID's peacekeepers stationed in Nertiti constructed the market. Photo by Albert González Farran, UNAMID.

“Peace brings economic growth, the possibility for more jobs and the development of infrastructure such as hospitals, schools and roads.”

and in the just-concluded Darfur Joint Assessment Mission process, which, through the Doha Donor Conference, will open yet another phase of tangible international intervention in Darfur.

I should also stress that it is crucial at this point in history, especially for the people of Darfur, that the international media establish a narrative that is driven by credible information and a better understanding of UNAMID's mandate, our operational limitations and our real successes. It is critically important for the international media, particularly as we move toward the Doha Donor Conference, to pay special attention to our revamped protection strategies, our newly reformed early-warning mechanisms, and the broad variety of work we've undertaken in early recovery and development.

I would like to reiterate here that the peace process is on track and is moving gradually despite the slow pace of DDPD implementation and the fact that two important armed groups are still holding out. We are also developing—together with the African Union Com-

mission and the State of Qatar, and in collaboration with the DDPD signatories—the Darfur Internal Dialogue and Consultation process, which should kick off in the not-too-distant future and is expected to contribute to reconciliation and social peace in Darfur.

Across Darfur, in more than 10 years of conflict, infrastructure has been systematically damaged or destroyed, and families have lost their homes and their means of making a living. Many Darfur communities lack water sources and other basic services. The basic services that do exist have either been overstretched or have collapsed completely due to lack of maintenance. Trading between communities has been curtailed by the security situation and an inability to move freely between settled areas.

This devastation from years of conflict has been exacerbated by competing land claims in most parts of Darfur, with many refugees and displaced people still facing problems related to returning to occupied areas that they once called home. In the current situation, most



On 10 December 2012, in El Daein, East Darfur, UNAMID Acting Head Aichatou Mindaoudou meets with government officials and community leaders to discuss the implementation of the Doha Document for Peace in Darfur, UNAMID's framework for the protection of civilians and local mediation initiatives. Photo by Rania Abdulrahman, UNAMID.

people living in camps for the displaced have little or no access to economic opportunities and depend on humanitarian aid for their daily subsistence. For women, especially, the conflict has been difficult. Even prior to the conflict, Darfur's infrastructure was underdeveloped. Roads were in a state of disrepair, public buildings were dilapidated, and schools were not maintained.

The DDPD provides for the Darfur Joint Assessment Mission to address these aspects of Darfur through recovery and development initiatives. The DJAM process is led by the DRA, which is assisted in this task by partner organizations and countries, such as the World Bank; the African Development Bank; the European Union; the US Agency for International Development; the UK Department for International Development; the Governments of Northern Ireland, Sudan and Qatar; the UN Development Programme, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees and other UN Country Team members; and of course UNAMID.

UNAMID is playing a substantial role in Darfur's recovery and development initiatives. It is my highest hope that the Doha Donor Conference will be a great success and will inject much-needed funds into Darfur's reconstruc-

tion and development projects.

VoD: In terms of development projects, one of your major agenda items since assuming the role of Acting Joint Special Representative has been to push forward UNAMID's programme for quick-impact projects. Can you talk a bit about how this programme is proceeding and also, more generally, how you see recovery and development contributing to the peace process now and possibly in the future?

Mindaoudou: UNAMID's many quick-impact-projects have helped build confidence in the peace process by enhancing the relationship between the Mission and local communities and by fostering early socioeconomic recovery. These quick-impact projects are small-scale, each amounting to US\$25,000, and are designed to make a measurable impact in the communities where they are applied. The funding threshold for each project increased recently to US\$50,000. To enhance efficiency, the mission decentralised the decision-making process related to managing the quick-impact projects to more directly address the needs of the communities throughout Darfur.

UNAMID has been working closely with the communities and with nongovernmental organizations to address the

root causes of the conflict and thereby improve the living conditions of the people in the region. More than 500 such projects are benefitting the communities across Darfur. Projects have included school construction, health centre rehabilitation, agricultural training, women's education, irrigation and other water projects, garbage disposal and waste management facility construction, and a broad variety of unique and innovative transformative projects that directly impact the lives of Darfuris.

UNAMID's military component, as one of the essential enablers of quick-impact projects in Darfur, has gone well beyond its core mandate to focus on humanitarian activities in support of local communities. These activities have included improving schools, grading roads, constructing bridges, digging water boreholes and training locals on new techniques for farming and construction.

In addition and with regard to broader development projects, in 2011, UNAMID, along with UN agencies and the Government of Sudan, held a major international conference on water in Darfur. The initiative, designed to develop solutions to one of the root causes of the conflict in Darfur, brought together 250 experts and donors to mobilize support for the creation of a sustainable water supply and service system for all communities in Darfur. The initiative raised nearly US\$500 million in pledges. UNAMID has been working to accelerate the outcome of the conference.

In terms of the broader picture on recovery and development projects affecting Darfur, let me first point out that security is an essential prerequisite for peace. On a basic level, peace allows people to enjoy lives free from violence and the threat of violence. Security and peace allow economies to flourish, directly benefitting people's daily lives, along with public institutions and private businesses. Peace brings economic growth, the possibility for more jobs and the development of infrastructure such as hospitals, schools and roads.

I believe the recovery and development initiatives in which UNAMID is

“It is crucial at this point in history, especially for the people of Darfur, that the international media establish a narrative that is driven by credible information and a better understanding of UNAMID’s mandate, our operational limitations and our real successes.”

actively engaged will have a durable and lasting impact on the lives of Darfuris.

VoD: Women occupy fewer than 5 per cent of the leadership roles in this Mission. What are your thoughts about gender in UNAMID and the issues related to Darfuri women that you’ve been working on during your tenure as Acting JSR?

Mindaoudou: I have been working to ensure that gender issues within the Mission are thoroughly addressed, and to ensure the integration of gender perspectives in all our operations. I have been highly supportive of implementing policies related to gender-based programmes. In UNAMID, just as in other missions, it is critical to work toward gender mainstreaming as a strategic objective in the implementation of our mandate. It is also critical to support new and innova-

tive mechanisms for achieving gender mainstreaming in UNAMID.

Far too frequently, the valuable talents of women in peacekeeping are unfortunately not given an opportunity to be put to good use in leadership roles. On the UN side, the Secretary-General has been working to rectify this issue, and we have been embracing these new policies in UNAMID with vigour. Higher numbers of women in positions of authority will contribute to more attention given to women’s issues in peacekeeping operations.

There are of course many qualified women who could readily fit into leadership positions here. However, due to the hard working and living conditions, both men and women are reluctant to come here to work. We have been working hard to balance gender in this Mission, as you can see exemplified in the

recent recruitments. At the senior management level, our new Chief of Civil Affairs is a woman, and we have concluded the recruitment of a new Police Commissioner, who is a woman. We are expecting more women to take leadership positions here. And of course you have me. I joined the mission 18 months ago in the capacity of the Deputy Joint Special Representative - Political. I have been Acting Joint Special Representative and Joint Chief Mediator *ad interim* for the past seven months.

With regard to UNAMID’s programmes, gender mainstreaming should be embraced with dedicated commitment by the Mission’s leadership. It is important to stress that women’s participation in key roles in peacekeeping operations is a fundamental aspect of gender equality. Of course, accountability to this issue begins with increasing the number of women in these decision-making positions, but it cannot stop there. What is required is the successful implementation of established Security Council Resolutions and other policies and reforms that will make peacekeeping more effective at promoting women’s rights.

In terms of Darfur, there has been progress on gender equality in recent years. More and more women are seeking to participate in the political process, and women’s groups are focusing on efforts to increase women’s representation in legislatures to reinvigorate political accountability. Today, and thanks in part to UNAMID’s work here, there are more women in Darfur’s local governments than ever before.

Examples of measurable progress in Darfur include establishing Sudanese Committees in all five Darfur states for implementing Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security and the creation of a women’s protection network consisting of women from more than 100 camps for internally displaced people.

We are required by the Security Council Resolution that renewed our mandate in 2012 to take appropriate measures to protect women from all forms of sexual violence and include sexual and gender-based violence as part of mission-wide

On 14 January 2013, displaced people take shelter in a public building in El Sereif, North Darfur, after fleeing their villages due to tribal clashes that broke out on 6 January between the Abbala and Beni Hussein tribes in the Jebel Amir area of North Darfur. Photo by Sojoud Elgarrai, UNAMID.



efforts to protect civilians. A significant achievement in this area was the establishment in Darfur of the Women's Legislative Caucus, which has been a turning point in legal reform and is expected to ensure legal accountability for human rights violations related to women.

Around the world, gender equality in democratic governance continues to be limited. Women are outnumbered in most legislatures. Many factors hinder women's political participation, such as cultural barriers, political parties being slow to respond to women's interests and conflicting demands on the time of women candidates due to their domestic and social responsibilities. These global factors also affect women in Darfur. Clearly, there are challenges, but we have made progress in working with every segment of Darfur society on these issues. And in terms of UNAMID, the extent of the work we are undertaking on gender issues requires that women be further empowered and supported by the Mission.

VoD: Finally, UNAMID has been around for five years now. What are your thoughts about the progress of the Mission so far and what the future might hold for the peace process and stability in Darfur?

Mindaoudou: UNAMID has significantly contributed to the improvement of the security situation in Darfur in its five years of operations. As I mentioned earlier, our presence itself is a major contributor to the security situation, which, despite intermittent clashes, has improved in some areas. We are conducting a significant number of patrols each day, and our peacekeepers are interacting with the community, building relationships and providing reassurance to Darfuris that they are not forgotten in this conflict.

Far too many displaced people continue to live in camps, and UNAMID continues to provide much of their security. This is a situation that has distressed me, and I have made it a key priority as Acting Joint Special Representative. We are actively supporting the voluntary return of displaced people and refugees to their homes of origin or to new areas. Across Darfur, there are signs of the so-



On 9 October 2012 in El Daein, East Darfur, UN peacekeepers stationed in the area provide security and keep watch over a water point. Photo by Albert González Farran, UNAMID.

cial fabric beginning to mend.

UNAMID is doing its best to support sustainable voluntary returns and is also supporting the push to accelerate recovery and development in Darfur. It is the joint responsibility of the Government of Sudan and the international community to ensure that access by Darfuris to security, basic services, education and vocational opportunities is available to guarantee the sustainability of voluntary returns.

beginning in Darfur. I have worked to reach out to other parties still holding out. The peace process must be inclusive. I am encouraged by the willingness of our regional partners to commit funds for recovery and development projects. If peace, funding and interest can be sustained, then there is certainly a bright future ahead for Darfur.

A peacekeeping mission is not designed to last forever. Our mandate is to help improve the security situation. Later

“Much has happened to devastate the communities here, but I have hope for the future of Darfur’s people, and I am confident that peace will prevail in the end.”

UNAMID will continue to support initiatives to address the root causes of the conflict, in particular the competition over dwindling natural resources. We will continue to work closely with the UN Country Team and the Government of Sudan on projects to accelerate early recovery and development in the region.

The adoption of the Doha Document for Peace in Darfur represents an important milestone in efforts to resolve the Darfur conflict. The agreement provides a unique opportunity for a new

this year, the UN Security Council will consider our mandate once again and may respond to the increased need for strengthened security in parts of Darfur along with the need for additional recovery and development initiatives. For such development activities to take root and grow, we must first have an end to the conflict, and there must be reconciliation. Much has happened to devastate the communities here, but I have hope for the future of Darfur's people, and I am confident that peace will prevail in the end. ■

Many People, Few Resources: Doctors and Their Patients

In Darfur, a region of Sudan that is lacking fully developed infrastructure, hospital personnel must find creative ways to provide even the most basic services.


BY ALBERT GONZÁLEZ FARRAN

As in other parts of the world, the doctors and nurses working in Darfur are dedicated not only to saving lives but also to providing a basic level of care that can successfully accommodate patient needs. In Darfur, a region of Sudan that is lacking fully developed infrastructure and where medical resources are scarce, hospital personnel must find creative ways to provide even the most basic services to the people living here.

During the past several years, the hospitals in the largest cities in Darfur have been dealing with an increasing number of patients who have fled conflicts in their home localities or have settled in nearby camps for the internally displaced. To respond to the increased demand for services, hospital administrators actively seek donors and compete for humanitarian projects to supplement their limited budgets.

“Any help is always welcome,” says Sami Ibrahim, Director of El Fasher Hospital in North Darfur. In the El Fasher Hospital and in other medical centres around Darfur, long queues are commonplace, multiple patients must share the same bed, and the relatives eager to keep watch on their loved ones must spend the night waiting outside the hospital buildings because the waiting areas are overcrowded already.

This photo essay highlights one of the many challenges the people of Darfur regularly face after long years of conflict. It is a tribute to the patients who need care and especially the doctors and nurses attending to them, struggling with limited resources to care for their clients’ medical needs and treat them with the dignity and respect they deserve. ■



Doctors and nurses assist a pregnant women during a complicated delivery at the Maternity Hospital in El Fasher, North Darfur. This medical centre has the reputation for being one of the best in Darfur for assisting pregnant women.

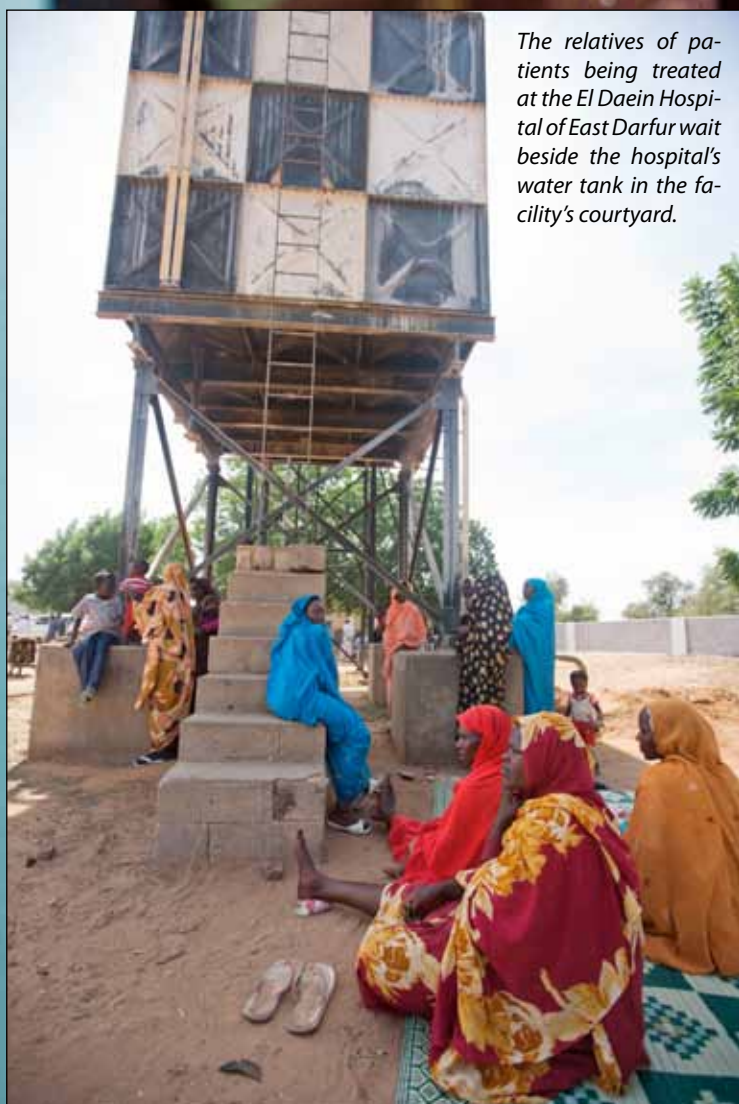


A staff member controls access to the Emergency Room at El Fasher Hospital in North Darfur. More than 500 patients come to the hospital each day to see one of the four emergency-room doctors on staff. At night, one doctor is on duty.

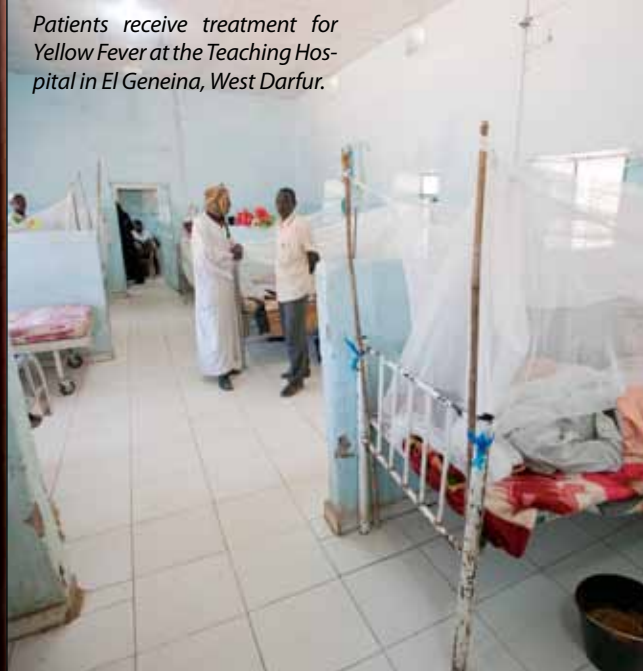


A child is accommodated in a box in the women's ward of El Fasher Hospital. On busy days, patients in the ward must share one of the 11 beds available. The Sudanese Ministry of Health began construction on a Pediatric Hospital in El Fasher, but there are not enough funds available to complete the project.

On 14 November 2012 in West Darfur, patients wait to be seen at the El Geneina Teaching Hospital. Photo by Albert González Farran, UNAMID.



The relatives of patients being treated at the El Daein Hospital of East Darfur wait beside the hospital's water tank in the facility's courtyard.



Patients receive treatment for Yellow Fever at the Teaching Hospital in El Geneina, West Darfur.



A nurse medicates a patient in the intensive-care unit of El Fasher Hospital, North Darfur. The intensive-care unit has 10 beds and is unable to accommodate all the patients requiring care.

Touching the Lives of Darfuri Street Children

Many years of conflict have resulted in an infrastructure that is in disrepair and an education system that lacks basic services. Against this backdrop, Darfur is struggling to meet the needs of its street children.

BY SHARON LUKUNKA



On 13 March 2010, a Darfuri child poses during a UNAMID photo shoot for a local information campaign designed to raise awareness about the issues street children face and to discourage internationals from paying them to wash cars. Photo by Albert González Farran, UNAMID.

Ten year old Mohamed, a resident of the Nifasha camp for displaced people in North Darfur, leaves his home around 8:00 a.m. each day to earn money cleaning cars in El Fasher. Mohamed lives with his parents and four younger siblings. His family receives some financial support from his uncle, but both of his parents are not working and they cannot afford to send him to school.

"I wash about three to four cars and take home between 5 and 10 Sudanese Pounds [US\$1 to US\$2] each day, but I want to go back to school," he says. "When

I get home, I give my mother the money for safekeeping for future use."

Stories like this one are not unusual in Darfur, where 10 years of conflict have resulted in hundreds of thousands of people displaced from their home areas with no means of making a living, an infrastructure that is in disrepair, and an education system that lacks basic services. Against this backdrop, Darfur is struggling to meet the needs of its street children.

According to data from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, at the end of the 1990s,

around the world, 108 million children of primary school age were not enrolled in school. That number has fallen to 61 million today. To encourage this trend, the United Nations has introduced various initiatives, such as the Education First strategy, the aim of which is to ensure that every child around the world is able to go to school and receive a quality education.

On 26 September 2012, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon announced that the UN had secured more than US\$1.5 billion in commitments for Education First. "We want children to at-

tend primary school and to progress toward higher education that will help them to succeed in life,” said the Secretary-General in a statement announcing the programme. “We cannot stop until every child goes to school—this is our task, this is our homework.”

While such initiatives are likely to help continue the global momentum in getting more kids to attend class, here in Darfur the infrastructure problems are compounded by population displacements, country-wide austerity measures and several other factors that are crippling an adequate response to the issue. In the North Darfur capital of

me to school,” says Osman. “That is why I am on the streets asking for money.”

One of Osman’s relatives, 10 year old Wigdan, is also a resident of the Nifasha camp and wanders the streets each day with the three boys to seek financial help. “I only attended school up to grade four in the camp, but could not continue because my family could not pay the fees,” she says. Wigdan’s father is not working because he is ill, and her mother is currently in Melit, North Darfur, working the land. She sends them food every month but it is not enough to meet their needs.

Wigdan has four older sisters, two of

of Darfur, as in any city, are not safe places for children. Osman and Wigdan, seemingly unaware of the risks, remain watchful for local police who will send them home when they are spotted. “We run and hide when we see them coming our way,” says Wigdan.

As for his future, Osman says he would like to work in construction, building houses and helping children who have found themselves in similar circumstances. Wigdan says she would like to be a school teacher so she can encourage students to remain in school.

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

In 1990, Sudan signed the UN Convention, and in 2010 signed into law its own Child Protection Act. According to the Sudanese Child Protection Act of 2010, the Sudanese States are responsible for the care and protection of children, and must facilitate the infrastructure for their proper upbringing, from all sides, in the framework of freedom, human dignity and spiritual and social values, and in a healthy environment. Chapter II, paragraph 23 of the Act states that vagrancy of children shall not be deemed an offence punishable by law.

Within this framework, UNAMID’s Child Protection Unit has been working with children directly affected by the conflict and with Sudanese authorities to set up specific programmes to provide protection for street children. UNAMID and local Government institutions meet regularly with UN agencies and national and international organizations to address this problem and find creative solutions to it.

For example, the Mission has been



On 14 November 2012 in El Geneina, West Darfur, UNAMID’s Human Rights section collaborated with local nongovernmental organization Child Friends to conduct an information workshop for 100 children, mostly orphans. Photo by Albert González Farran, UNAMID.

El Fasher, for example, the city continues to experience rapid population growth as a result of displacements, and the town’s main market area is drawing droves of street children from nearby villages and camps for the internally displaced.

One such child is Osman, who is nine years old. As he walks the street looking for handouts to help support his family, he is accompanied by his two younger brothers. The three of them live in the nearby Nifasha camp and have resorted to begging for money to help their families. “Our family does not have money to send

whom are living at home. “When I get money, I take it home to my sisters so they can buy food for the house,” she says. “This is the only way we can survive.”

When asked, many of the street children in Darfur will say they used to go to school and recognize the benefit of it. But the dire circumstances they face cause them to drop out. Osman and Wigdan, both of whom used to attend school each day, say they are not happy with their lives now and would prefer to go to class.

The motives of these children are both earnest and straightforward, but the streets



On 11 December 2012 in Kabkabiya, North Darfur, students attend school in a classroom built by UNAMID peacekeepers as part of the Mission's ongoing quick-impact projects designed to help rebuild Darfur's infrastructure at the community level. The Nuru Salam Basic School for boys educates nearly 3,000 students each day with 23 teachers, making for average class sizes of more than 100 pupils. Photo by Albert González Farran, UNAMID.

On 13 December 2010 in El Fasher, North Darfur, a child smiles during a class conducted in the El Fasher Centre for Street Children funded by Sudan's Ministry of Social Affairs and the United Nations Children's Fund. Photo by Olivier Chassot, UNAMID.

working with the Sudanese Ministry of Social Affairs and Darfur's State Councils for Child Welfare to provide technical support and training for a Child Protection Working Group, a mechanism set up to assess and address the needs of Darfur's street children. Another example is UNAMID's work with Sudanese Police in providing guidance and training for the newly established Family and Child Protection Units, which have been rolled out across Darfur as subunits set up in Sudanese Police stations to address the needs of families and children.

"Most of the children living on the streets in a social vacuum are doing so because of poverty, conflict and, more importantly, family issues," says Mr. Abakar Ali, a manager in the Ministry of Social Affairs. "The issue of street children in Darfur requires a collective effort to be fully addressed."

For its part, the Ministry of Social Affairs has been working with the North Darfur Council for Child Welfare in implementing a broad-reaching programme to address street children. But the Ministry of Social Affairs is not unlike other Ministries in Darfur faced with the need to scale back programmes to accommodate Sudan's re-

cent austerity measures. "We need support from UN agencies and other relevant actors to be able to implement our plans," Mr. Ali concedes.

Despite reduced budgets, the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Ministry of Education have been using what resources they have to provide street kids with uniforms and books and send them to school to give them the education they will need to earn a living. While such efforts may be making an impact, more and more children are showing up on the streets of Darfur's major towns and cities each day.

Ms. Juliana Kalu, a UNAMID Police Advisor, is one of the many dedicated officers who accompany UNAMID patrol teams throughout Darfur each day to talk with children in the camps for displaced people and encourage them to continue their education. "We talk to the children to discourage them from begging and engaging in any sort of employment while in school," she says. "We let them know that they have the right to an education."

In December 2010, the United Nations Children's Fund, in collaboration with the Ministry of Social Affairs, established a Centre in El Fasher to help street kids. The Centre offers education programmes and

a safe environment. "The project provides skills training for street children and also helps trace and reunify families," Mr. Ali explains.

While such programmes have begun to make an impact, the constant influx of people to the larger towns and cities across Darfur has placed a burden on the region's already overextended infrastructure. And with Sudan's austerity measures being felt at all levels of society, especially in terms of a scarcity of jobs, many schoolchildren are also trying to help their families by doing menial work after classes.

Adam, age 14, is one such adolescent. He is in the sixth grade in a school in the Nifasha camp, and lives with his parents and two older brothers. One of his brothers lives in Khartoum; the other sells mobile phone credit from home. His mother takes care of the family at home and his father maintains a laundry business in town. To contribute to the family financially, Adam works in town after school.

"When I am not in school, I make money working as a shoe-shine in the streets," says Adam. "What I make at the end of the day, I take home for my mother to buy food and help pay for school." ■

More Must Be Done for Darfur's Women

As we commemorate International Women's Day, we do so with the understanding that women's engagement in the peace process, while more than in recent years, has a long way to go.

BY YEGERAWORK ANGAGAW

The theme of this year's International Women's Day, a global event that is celebrated annually on 8 March, is "A Promise Is a Promise: Time for Action to End Violence Against Women." In Darfur, while much progress has been made to advance the agenda of women's rights and ending violence against women, much more needs to be done.

Since the inception of UNAMID, the Gender Advisory Unit (GAU) has worked in several key areas: peace and the political process; governance, rule of law and human rights; sexual and gender-based violence; and recovery and community dialogue. In each of these areas, GAU has reached out to different groups—including government personnel, community leaders, internally displaced people, civil society organizations, young people and nomads—to develop policies and help implement programs designed to improve the lives of Darfuri women.

Examples of measurable progress include establishing Sudanese Committees in Darfur for implementing Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security; the creation of a protection network with women from more than 100 camps for internally displaced people; and building a youth network at Darfur universities. In addition, GAU has helped strengthen partnerships with several state institutions and community groups to support them as they work to build crucial mechanisms to respond to the special protection needs of women.

UN Security Council Resolution 2063, which renewed UNAMID's mandate in 2012, demands that "the parties to the conflict immediately take appropriate measures to protect civilians, including women and children, from all forms of sexual violence" and requires UNAMID to include sexual

and gender-based violence as part of the Mission's efforts to protect civilians. In line with these directives, GAU has been conducting studies to assess gender-related dimensions of the Darfur conflict and to promote evidence-based advocacy to prevent sexual and gender-based violence.

Each year, GAU marks the UN's information campaign of 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence, an annually celebrated follow-on to Security Council Resolution 1325, with events across Darfur designed to highlight the issues in Resolution 1325. Similarly, GAU commemorates the UN's annual "Open Days" events throughout Darfur by facilitating workshops to review and analyse the progress made so far on women's issues. In 2012, events for both campaigns focused on conflict resolution, participation in the peace processes, and promotion and implementation of Resolution 1325.

A major step forward in all of these efforts has been the Government of Sudan's willingness and commitment to set up strategies to ensure full compliance with the provisions of Resolution 1325, especially in the areas of advocacy campaigns and preventing and responding to sexual and gender-based violence. A notable development in this area was the establishment in Darfur of a Women's Legislative Caucus, which is expected to foster legal reform and ensure accountability for violations against women.

Last year, GAU conducted research of Sudanese laws pertaining to violence against women. The research reviewed existing legislative gaps and served as a reference point to women parliamentarians, helping to strengthen their efforts related to regional, national and international commitments pertaining to women's participation in governance structures and the im-

portant linkages with the Doha Document for Peace in Darfur.

In addition to this work, GAU has been facilitating women's participation in the peace process through regular civil society meetings in all Darfur states. For example, women's participation at the All Darfur Stakeholders' Conference in 2011 reached 41 per cent. The aim of these efforts is to empower women leaders to take charge of their own protection issues, expand the options for victims of violence and increase women's participation in rule-of-law institutions.

As we commemorate International Women's Day this year in Darfur, we do so with the understanding that women's engagement in the peace process, while significantly more visible and meaningful than it has been in recent years, has a long way to go. Ongoing work with women legislators to reform specific laws is critical to achieving progress. Continuing to strengthen partnerships with communities and government institutions to leverage ongoing momentum in reform initiatives represents the only viable way forward for Darfur's women.

Despite many challenges, GAU has made progress in working with every segment of Darfur society and Government structure to mobilize support and advocate for resolving gender issues. The primary focus now is to continue to increase women's participation in the peace process, to strengthen the mechanisms set up to protect women and girls from sexual and gender-based violence, to promote women's equitable access to services and resources, and ultimately to sustainably empower Darfuri women on a socioeconomic level. ■

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On 24 February 2013 in El Fasher, North Darfur, Fatima Abdullah Khalil (left) and Mahasin Osman Altahir (right), pose for a photo. They are hakamas, women who wield significant social influence through chanting poetry and song. Photo by Sojoud Elgarrai, UNAMID.

Darfur's Peace Chants: An Interview with Mahasin Osman Altahir

In an interview conducted in El Fasher, *Voices of Darfur* talked with Mahasin Osman Altahir, a well-known hakama, who chants for peace, peaceful coexistence and reconstruction in Darfur.

BY EMADELDIN RIJAL

Hakamas are traditional female singers dedicated to drawing attention to social, political and economic issues in their communities. Through their lyrical songs, purposefully crafted poems and improvised words, the Hakamas praise

the sacrifices of their ancestors and draw attention to the successes of their clans.

As singing poets, they wield influence over the members of their tribes by weaving positive principles and values into the social fabric of their communi-

ties. The influence of the Hakamas is not just on their local communities. They work their magic on all levels of society, especially at social events and cultural gatherings, channeling the collective joy and sorrow of those around them.

In Darfur, the Hakamas have a reputation that is not unlike powerful political figures, in that they are able to destroy personal reputations in an instant and drive men to fight wars. At the same time, they are known for being able to help avert community conflicts and disputes by exerting their influence in solving complex social problems. While most Hakamas are illiterate, they possess a deep knowledge of local history and a poetic talent for generating broad interest in social justice.

Voices of Darfur talked with Mahasin Osman Altahir, a well-known El Fasher Hakama, about the impact of the Hakamas and their role in peace and peaceful coexistence. Ms. Altahir, a woman of 40, was born and grew up in the Buram area of South Darfur. She spent her early life as a member of a nomadic community, traveling from a place to place in and around Darfur, but now resides in El Fasher, the capital of North Darfur.

Voices of Darfur: Could you tell us about when and how did you become a Hakama?

Altahir: I can recall the fact that when I was still around the age of 10, I used to attend routine social gatherings that brought together Hakamas and different members of society. Despite the tasks assigned to me during those gatherings, where I had to serve the Hakamas tea, I was dedicating myself to listening attentively to the songs and poems recited by them.

At that time, I felt like I would love to be a hakama one day. So the idea of becoming a hakama kept growing out of my regular attendance at these gatherings. By the time I was 13, I was singing and chanting with several hakamas. At one point, we had to present songs and poems as part of our leader's inauguration festivities. People were worried about whether I would have the ability to take part in the celebration. How-

ever, when I got on the floor, my performance, more or less, stimulated the crowd to cheer me.

At the end of the day, I was given a calf as a gift by our leader himself. Since then, I have been acting as a hakama. That ceremony was the beginning for me and was a showcase for my personal abilities.

VoD: What does it take to become a hakama?

Altahir: It is no secret that all of the hakamas' work is based on instinctual talent and creativity. I am the sole daughter, among five others, to have taken this path. There is typically only one hakama among 10 villages in any given area in Darfur. My collection of poems and songs are inspired by the memories of my late grandmother, who was also

“All of the Hakamas in Darfur are no longer singing for war, but instead are chanting for peace. Today, the Hakamas are much more aware of the complicated issues of the community than they have ever been.”

a hakama. So it takes some basic talent and creativity, a sense of tradition and a willingness to take on the social role required of all hakamas.

VoD: So are the hakamas affiliated with a specific tribe or geographical location?

Altahir: Hakamas neither have a specific tribe nor a specific geographical location. They can be found in every place and community in Darfur. But what makes the hakamas valued by all Darfuris is their objectives, which are noble and uplifting.

VoD: Could you talk a bit more about these objectives? What would you say is the primary role of the hakamas in the community?

Altahir: Hakamas have a great role in the community. Hakamas have the power to work either toward positive or

negative objectives. They have the power to spark a fire, and at the same time can put out that fire. But the wisest of the hakamas are the ones who take pride in addressing issues related to peace and peaceful coexistence, reconstruction and development.

Moreover, hakamas can serve as the vehicles for denouncing tribalism. As a matter of fact, the current devotion of the hakamas across Darfur to peace and stability is apparent. We have begun propagating the culture of peace. In addition, many of the hakamas are now working on helping to draw attention to critical social issues, such as the harmful practice of female genital mutilation.

VoD: Do hakamas typically have other work in addition to their work as hakamas? In other words, is the role of a hakama a full-time job or must they have a parallel vocation?

Altahir: Like other artists, hakamas typically have daytime vocations. For example, I am currently working as a tea vendor and am also running a small restaurant in El Fasher's market area. I am dedicating myself to all of this daytime work to ensure the wellbeing of my sons and daughters whose father went missing more than 15 years ago.

VoD: How frequently do you compose new songs and poems?

Altahir: It depends on the events and occasions I attend. In some cases, I feel required to respond immediately to a new issue in the community with a new chant. There are touching moments as well, requiring me to be inventive and creative, and there are many sensitive situations that require careful crafting of lyrics. I usually improvise poems and songs in a way that best fits the context of the given situation.

VoD: These days, in what types of the events do you typically perform or take part?



On 24 February 2013 in El Fasher, North Darfur, Fatima Abdullah Khalil (right) and Mahasin Osman Altahir (left), pose for a photo. They are hakamas, women who influence social change through chanting poetry and song. Photo by Sojoud Elgarrai, UNAMID.

“We are working hard to overcome the difficulties associated with the Darfur conflict. It is the conflict that made me not only yearn for peace, but also long for the past.”

Altahir: At the local level, I participate regularly in community and social events, such as horse races and wedding parties. At national level, I take part in many events too. Recently, I participated in Sudan’s Cultural Nights, which were held in different towns across the country. Such events are aimed at showcasing the impact of culture on peace and development.

VoD: Many have said that the hakamas wield significant power over the members of their communities. What are your thoughts about the ability of the hakamas to exert positive influence in their communities?

Altahir: If the hakama calls a meeting, all of the residents of the village will be there. People are very cautious about showing respect to the hakama, because otherwise she will make fun of them. Apart from exerting influence at the local level, the hakamas devote themselves

to national issues. They can encourage men to fight a war against foreign invaders, for example. Many hakamas played a great role in repelling the colonials to gain the independence of Sudan.

VoD: As you mentioned, hakamas have been known for their chants that urge men into battle. Have you done these kinds of chants before and what are your thoughts about them?

Altahir: I encouraged men to fight back against the aerial attack on Al-Shifa Medical Supplies Industry in Khartoum. The attacks were blamed on a western country that had mistaken the medical supplies facility for a weapons facility. The attacks took place at a time when there was a great need for medicine to help curb the spread of chronic diseases such as malaria. Therefore, I composed poems and songs condemning the attacks and urging our men to fight back.

VoD: And what about the hakamas

who encourage men to start conflict rather than simply responding to it?

Altahir: That sort of hakama is no longer seen in Darfur. They were living in darkness. That darkness has now been replaced by the light. All of the hakamas in Darfur are no longer singing for war, but instead are chanting for peace. Today, the hakamas are much more aware of the complicated issues of the community than they have ever been. The mentality of the traditional hakamas has gradually been transformed from the culture of war into the culture of peace.

VoD: In terms of the conflict in Darfur, how has the conflict here affected you personally?

Altahir: I have been affected so much by the conflict in Darfur. Before the outbreak of the war, all of us were comfortable. However, as a result of this conflict, the economic and security situation is worsening. We are suffering the direct consequences of the war.

The financial problems of members of all of our communities are acute. It is becoming difficult to get simple needs met for each day of life here, such as firewood. We are working hard to overcome the difficulties associated with the Darfur conflict. It is the conflict that made me not only yearn for peace, but also long for the past. I recall a time when I used to go on trade journeys to different parts of Darfur without being confronted with any security challenges.

VoD: What do you see as the way forward for Darfur?

Altahir: Darfur needs to have its people reunited. It needs to have its people reunited against tribalism and to listen to the voice of reason. Darfur needs to have development projects. All of these can put Darfur back on the path to peace.

VoD: In the end, what would you say to the people of Darfur to move things forward toward this vision you’ve described?



Altahir: I truly hope that my voice could be heard by all. It is now time for peace and reconstruction. I hope that the future generation will dedicate their lives to education and embrace a culture of peace. ■



On 24 February 2013 in El Fasher, North Darfur, Mahasin Osman Altahir, pictured here, sings a chant. Photo by Sojoud Elgarrai, UNAMID.



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