

VOICES

of Darfur

VOL 07 • NO 05

Art as a tool of Peace:

Interview with artist
Yehia Mohammed

**"We must uphold the human
essence in every Darfuri"**
—An interview with Deputy
Joint Special Representative-
Protection, Bintou Keita

**Mariam--giving women
a voice in Darfur's peace
process**

**Reinforcing rule of law
by building capacity of
national mechanisms**



AFRICAN UNION - UNITED NATIONS
HYBRID OPERATION IN DARFUR (UNAMID)

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF NOTE

I'M PLEASED to introduce the June 2017 issue of *Voices of Darfur*, which contains news, features and interviews not only about unique aspects of life in Darfur but also about UNAMID's ongoing efforts to facilitate lasting peace in the region.

In the interview "We must uphold the human essence in every Darfuri" with UNAMID's Deputy Joint Special Representative- (DJSR)-Protection, Ms. Bintou Keita speaks about the uniqueness of her current job, how she defines the Mission's protection of civilians mandate and the warmth and love she has experienced from the people living in this conflict-torn region. The article "Mariam--giving women a voice in Darfur's peace process" describes Mariam Adam Hussein as an inspiration to many women across West Darfur in her role as a leader for displaced women as well as her conviction that every individual must contribute to the peace process across the region.

The article "Reinforcing Rule of law in Darfur by building capacity of National Justice Mechanisms" reflects the Mission's works in partnership with Sudan National Judicial authorities and Attorney General Office to improve the

rule of law in Darfur by promoting mediation efforts to resolve conflicts by building the capacity of justice institutions, such as rural courts for mediation of disputes, prosecution offices and prison services across Darfur.

The collection of photographs titled "UNAMID Outreach: Peace Through Sports" portrays sports as a tool that contribute to strengthening ties and enhancing relations between various communities at different strata of society. Sports cuts across all social barriers and brings people together in harmonized fashion, regardless of their social status, ethnic or political affiliations. Finally, in our cover feature, "Art as a Tool of Peace", Voices of Darfur presents an interview with the Nyala-based artist, Yehia Adam Mohammed, where he speaks of the art scene in South Darfur, what inspires him and the role of local artists in bringing about social peace and cohesion in Darfur.

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.

Carlos Araujo
Chief
Communications & Public Information Section

ON THE COVER



Artist Yehia Adam Mohammed is pictured displaying his paints at his studio in Nyala, South Darfur. Photo by Saeed Salim, UNAMID.



On 25 May 2017 UNAMID, CPIS Communication and Public Information Section (CPIS), in collaboration with Open University of Sudan, organized a Photo Exhibition in Khartoum as part of the commemoration of the International Day of UN Peacekeepers. Photo by Mohamad Almahady UNAMID

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UNAMID Joint Special Representative engages with East Darfur community



UNAMID Joint Special Representative, Kingsley Mamabolo, conducted a two-day visit to El Daein, East Darfur, where he engaged with the state Wali (Governor), Anas Omar, and members of the Native Administration on local issues On 7 May 2017. The JSR also met with representatives of South Sudanese refugees at Kario camp and listened to their concerns. Photo by Abdul Rasheed Yakubu, UNAMID.

EL DAEIN - UNAMID Joint Special Representative, Kingsley Mamabolo, on 7 May 2017, met the Governor, tribal leaders, and community representatives during a two-day visit to El Daein, East Darfur. Local issues were canvassed during a meeting with the Wali (Governor), Annas Mohammed and members of the Native Administration, led by the Nazir of Rezigat, Mahmoud Madibo. The discussion included the latest developments in the state, and ongoing cooperation between the Mission and local authorities.

Mr. Mamabolo told tribal leaders that the Native Administration plays a pivotal role in restoring peace and stability in East Darfur. He expressed his readiness, within the Mission's

mandate, to assist and support peace-related projects. In addition, the Joint Special Representative praised efforts made by the state government in sharing its resources with refugees at Kario camp.

Meanwhile, Mr. Madibo thanked the Mission for supporting East Darfur communities, underscoring the exemplary cooperation between local authorities and the Mission. Also during the 7-8 May visit, Mr. Mamabolo met with women and youth groups, and, at Kario camp, representatives of South Sudanese refugees. During a meeting involving youth and the State Committee on Security Council Resolution 1325 – on women, peace and security -- Mustafa Bakhit, a youth

spokesperson, expressed appreciation for the efforts made by UNAMID in supporting tribal reconciliations, social peace and peaceful coexistence in East Darfur.

Mr. Bakhit said that UNAMID-supported training and workshops contributed to evolving good relations and strengthened ties between people in the community. Youth will continue to cultivate a culture of peace and promote peaceful coexistence among local communities in the area, said Mr. Bakhit.

Samiya Musa, Chairperson of the Committee, said that women are the most vulnerable segment of society and, as such, require special attention and support in terms of income generation activities.

UNAMID supports demobilization of 500 ex-combatants in West Darfur



Ex-combatants attend an awareness-raising session as part of a recent 10-day demobilization at a camp in El Geneina, West Darfur. Some 500 former fighters were reached during the session, which was jointly supported by the Sudan Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Commission, the World Food Programme and UNAMID. Photo by Muntasir Sharafadin, UNAMID.

EL GENEINA – Some 500 ex-combatants, including 30 women, are going through the process of demobilization and return to civilian life at a camp in El Geneina, West Darfur, thanks in part to support from UNAMID.

The session, which kicked off on 17 May and is expected to continue for 10-days, represents the fourth round of demobilization. It is supported by UNAMID, the World Food Programme (WFP) and the Sudan Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Commission. The Commission is supporting the demobilization of a further 150 ex-combatants from the Sudan Armed Forces and the Popular Defense Forces.

The former combatants are from non-government armed movements that signed the 2011 Doha Document for Peace in Darfur (DDPD) and 2006 Darfur Peace Agreement (DPA). They comprise elements of the Liberation and Justice Movement (LJM), Popular Forces for the Restoration of

Democracy (PFRD) and Liberal and Reform (L&R) Movement.

Islika Sesay, Head of UNAMID's Community Stabilization Section in West Darfur, described the Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration process as part of the final security arrangements in the implementation of the DDPD and DPA.

"The successful execution of this operation will bring the official number of ex-combatants demobilized from movement forces since 2010, to a total of 3,306 adults in West Darfur," said Mr. Sesay.

Captain Jamaleldin Abdullah, Commander of the demobilization camp, explained that 150 ex-combatants have been demobilized since the camp was launched on 15 May.

"I would like to thank UNAMID and WFP for supporting the process," said Captain Abdullah, noting that the UN Development Fund would play a subsequent role.

Ex-combatants interviewed during

the session emphasized the importance of peace and urged non-signatory movements to put down their arms and join the peace process.

A former combatant said that his group considers peace a strategic option, so he and others signed the document to bring about peace and alleviate the suffering of the people of Darfur from the scourge of war.

Another former combatant echoed the call for peace, saying it would improve conditions for refugees and enable internally displaced people to return to their homes.

UNAMID provided logistical, technical and financial support to the session including a payment to each ex-combatant to assist with their move to civilian life.

WFP provided the ex-combatants with food rations for three months. In addition, the UNDP will facilitate assistance after the demobilization exercise, including support through income-generation projects.

Milestone achieved in clearance of Explosive Remnants of War in West Darfur



UNAMID's Ordnance Disposal Office, in partnership with the National Mine Action Centre and the local community, celebrated on 24 April, 2017, all registered contaminated areas being clear of Explosive Remnants of War and unexploded ordnance in Forobaranga, West Darfur. The project is part of the Mission's mandate to protect civilians. Photo by Muntasir Sharafadin, UNAMID.

FOROBARANGA, WEST DARFUR

- Thousands of people from Forobaranga, West Darfur, gathered to mark a milestone in the safety of their community this week. In an event on 24 April, UNAMID and the National Mine Action Centre joined with locals in Forobaranga town to celebrate the clearance of Explosive Remnants of War (ERW) and unexploded ordnance (UXO) from all registered contaminated areas in the locality. Participants also welcomed a pilot survey aimed at ensuring the area is kept free of residual ERW and UXO.

The celebration represents the culmination of over nine years of efforts by UNAMID and the centre to clear the land and make it safe for the community use, and is in accordance with UNAMID's protection of civilian's mandate.

Fadul El-Haja, the Wali (Governor) of West Darfur, commended UNAMID for its role in the successful completion of the project, which he said contributes towards peace in the area and paves the way for development projects.

Mr. El-Haja highlighted the Government's commitment to support peace, enhance security and provide the local population with basic services.

Lt. General Ali Salim, State Minister of Defense, praised the Darfuri people for their support of peace and stability. He noted the importance of the entire community being involved in programmes that mitigate the effects of war and contribute towards development.

"As part of our responsibility, we are committed to free Sudan from ERW in line with the Ottawa Treaty," said Lt. General Salim, referring to

the convention signed in 1997 that placed an international ban on anti-personnel mines.

Abdulhamid Naheed, a representative of the local community, commended the role played by all parties towards the clearance of ERW and expressed his hope that development projects would follow.

Oumar Kane, Head of UNAMID Sector West office, reiterated the Mission's commitment to work with the Government of Sudan and the community to achieve the goals of peace and security in the region. He urged the community to refrain from engaging in conflict, which would re-contaminate the area with ERW and UXO.

Mr. Kane called on locals to be an example of a community that promotes peace and supports development, security and peaceful co-existence

among diverse groups of people. Jeffrey McMurdo, Programme Manager for the UNAMID Ordnance Disposal Office, said that Forobaranga is the first locality in Darfur to complete removal of all reported ERW. This milestone un-

derlines the readiness of UNAMID and the centre, along with State and Local Government, to work together to clear the remaining areas of contamination.

"For nine years UNAMID has been clearing and sometimes re-clearing

those parts of Darfur affected by conflict. With the current ceasefires there is hope that there will not be any new ERW," said Mr. McMurdo.

Similar ERW and UXO clearance projects are planned for the rest of West Darfur.

Safety in conflict zones focus of workshop for Darfur-based female journalists



UNAMID's Communications and Public Information Section, in partnership with UNESCO and the Sudanese Union of Journalists, concluded on 16 May 2017, a three-day "safety in conflict zones" workshop for female journalists in Darfur. Some 24 journalists, from all Darfur states -- including eight UNAMID personnel -- participated in the event, which took place at the Mission's headquarters in El Fasher, North Darfur. Photo by Mohamad Almahady, UNAMID.

EL FASHER – Women journalists from across Darfur took part in a 'Safety in Conflict Zones' workshop in El Fasher recently, supported in part by UNAMID.

The three-day workshop involved 16 Darfur-based women journalists, along with eight female UNAMID public information staff. During the workshop, participants learned to recognize the circumstances that entail risks for personal safety; to assess major safety risks; and how to effectively deal with public disorders or emergencies. They also acquired

skills that will enhance their safety and security, and were exposed to best practices for conflict reporting.

Nagla Jumaa, a participant and journalist from Nyala, South Darfur, noted: "The workshop was very important for us in terms of protecting ourselves as journalists, because in Darfur we have been suffering for more than 13 years from war and conflict."

Another journalist, Reem Abdalla, from Zalingei, Central Darfur described the workshop as the most important she had ever attended.

"It brought together journalists

from all the five states of Darfur and created a spirit of harmony and co-operation between us as a group," said Ms. Abdalla.

The training was supported by UNAMID's Communications and Public Information Section, in partnership with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the Sudanese Union of Journalists.

UNAMID has trained more than 70 local journalists in 2017 in a major contribution to the development of a strong media in Darfur.

UNAMID marks International Day of UN Peacekeepers



UNAMID celebrated the International Day of UN Peacekeepers at the Mission Headquarters in El Fasher, North Darfur. The event included a military and police parade; observing a minute of silence and laying of wreaths in honour of the Peacekeepers who lost their lives in the line of duty. Photo by Amin Ismail, UNAMID.

EL FASHER — Remembering fallen peacekeepers was a key part of a ceremony observing the International Day of UN Peacekeepers held on 29 May 2017 at UNAMID headquarters in El Fasher, North Darfur.

Attended by Mission leadership, a representative of North Darfur and UNAMID military, police and civilian staff, the event included a military and police parade. Peacekeepers who lost their lives in the line of duty were honoured with a minute of silence and the laying of wreaths. The lags of Sudan, the African Union and the UN were lowered to half-mast as a further sign of respect.

Related events were organized by the Mission in all sectors across Darfur and in Khartoum.

Bintou Keita, UNAMID's Deputy Joint Special Representative-Protection, read the UN Secretary-General's message, which took the theme of

"Investing in Peace around the World".

Twelve peacekeepers have been killed to date this year, while more than 3,500 have lost their lives across the years while serving the UN.

"Their efforts on behalf of the international community are one of the most concrete expressions of the UN Charter's determination 'to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war.' We all owe them a great debt," said Ms. Keita.

Peacekeeping operations have evolved from monitoring of cease-fires to protection of civilians, disarming ex-combatants, protecting human rights, promoting the rule of law, supporting free and fair elections, and minimizing land-mine risks.

"The UN is working hard to make all our peacekeeping operations cost-effective from start to finish. We are constantly finding ways to reform, restructure and drive costs down. At the same

time, UN peacekeepers are relentless in searching for new ways to build sustainable peace," said Ms. Keita, quoting the Secretary-General's message.

Hamaza Abass, the Minister of Culture and Environment for North Darfur, who was representing the Wali (Governor) of North Darfur at the event, expressed his appreciation to UNAMID peacekeepers for their efforts in support of peace, stability and development in Darfur.

Mr. Abass reiterated the commitment of the Government of North Darfur to cooperate with UNAMID in the cause of peace.

The International Day of UN Peacekeepers is celebrated worldwide. More than 113,000 'Blue Helmets', UN Police and civilian personnel are currently deployed to 16 missions, while more than one million women and men have served under the UN flag.

UNAMID organizes Peace conference in El Sereif, North Darfur



UNAMID's Civil Affairs Section, in collaboration with the UN Development Programme, organized on 14 March 2017, a peace conference to defuse tensions between the Northern Rezeigat and Beni Hussein in El Sereif, North Darfur. The event is part of the Mission's continued mediation efforts to promote peaceful coexistence among local communities in Darfur. Photo by Salah Mohammed, UNAMID.

From 13 to 14 March 2017, UNAMID's Civil Affairs Section, in collaboration with the UN Development Programme (UNDP), Oxfam America, local authorities and native Administrations, jointly organized a two-day peace conference in El Sereif Locality to create a platform to discuss intercommunal conflict issues between the Beni Hussein, Northern Rezeigat and other minority tribes in the area and other areas of North Darfur state. The conference was also aimed at rebuilding social cohesion and maintenance of peaceful coexistence in the area.

The two-day event, which is part of the Mission's continued mediation efforts to promote peaceful coexistence among local communities in Darfur, brought together more than 1000 participants including prominent tribal leaders from neighboring localities, West, South and Central Darfur states and Khartoum, civil society organization as well as government officials including the Deputy Wali of North Darfur, Mr. Mohammed Breraima Hassab Alnabei, UNAMID

and UNDP representatives.

In their discussions, participants called for the establishment of joint mechanisms between Beni Hussein, northern Rezeigat, Zaghawa, and Bediat tribes to manage pastoralists' movement and shared natural resources in Abo-Jidad Area, and the need to establish early warning systems to prevent inter-communal conflicts. The restoration of state authority, rule of law and public order through empowerment of law enforcement institutions such as police and judiciary in a manner that will facilitate control of out-laws, were also discussed.

Addressing the gathering, Mr. Hassan Gibril, UNAMID Head of office, Sector North, indicated that the peace conference was organized in line with the Mission's mandate and priorities. He also encouraged all participants to continue to embrace mutual dialogue and to share limited resources in the area.

Mike Dzakuma, Acting Head of Civil Affairs Section, reiterated UNAMID's readiness to continue the good collaboration with the state government, local authorities, the

native administrations and communities to promote peaceful coexistence in the locality and across Darfur. He encouraged participants to actively contribute to the discussions and make recommendations for durable solutions to curb inter-communal conflicts and enhance social peace in the locality. "Recurrent tensions over access to shared limited natural resources including land, water, pasture and minerals is a major trigger for inter-communal violence, especially in localities west of El Fasher, North Darfur", added Mr. Dzakuma.

Representing UNDP, Mr. Osman Abdulkareim, explained that his organization is currently implementing a project to promote reconciliation and coexistence for sustainable peace in Darfur. He added that the UNDP will contribute to all efforts aimed at resolving conflicts through peaceful mechanisms of reconciliation and mediation across Darfur.

Ahmed Ali, a representative of the organizing committee called on participants to discuss the establishment of Ajaweed committees to resolve tensions between the tribes and address issues related to land (Hakorat) and encouraged use of traditional conflict resolution mechanisms to achieve positive results.

The representative of the native administrations, Mr. Ismail Suleiman touched on the critical need to empower native administrations and the Ajaweed Councils to build

social cohesion in Darfur. He also urged the government to collect arms from civilians and to form follow-up mechanisms for the effective implementation of reconciliations outcomes.

At the end of the Conference, Traditional leaders' signed an agreement on co-existence and rebuilding the social structures including denuncia-

tion of conflicts and all types of violence and culture of war and working towards disseminating the culture of peace. The agreement further commits all concerned to take all measures available to them to prevent the eruption of conflicts, denounce tribalism and embrace the spirit of acceptance of the other people's concerns in order to regain trust and mutual co-

existence to attain and achieve common shared benefits and interests. The agreement also addressed the need to encourage collective efforts towards fighting criminals, outlaws and spoilers by not providing them with collective tribe's protection so as to avoid impunity and encourage the dissemination of all good values, ethics and morals. ■

UNAMID trains South Darfur women in making fuel-efficient stoves



UNAMID's Gender Advisory Unit recently concluded a two-month capacity-building programme for women in Kateela locality, South Darfur, on making fuel-efficient stoves. More than 1,000 women have benefited from the training which is aimed at protecting the environment and minimizing domestic accidents to which Darfuri women are exposed by using firewood. Photo by Amir Abdalla, UNAMID.

UNAMID's Gender Advisory Unit in Nyala, South Darfur, recently concluded a two-month capacity-building programme for women on making fuel-efficient stoves in Kateela locality. More than 1,000 women benefited from the training, which is part of the Mission's Quick Impact Projects (QIPs) programme.

The programme incorporated dual objectives of protecting the environment as well as minimizing possible security risks to which Darfuri women are exposed to while collecting firewood.

Addressing the gathering, Ber-

hanemeskel Nega, Head of Office, UNAMID Sector South, underscored the importance of empowering women to enable them to take care of their families. "UNAMID stands ready to support the local community and enhance cooperation with the state Government to ensure progress on the path of peace building, reconciliation and peaceful coexistence, which are the foundations of any developed community," he said.

Addressing the participants, Aisha Hanno, State Minister of Social Welfare, emphasized the need for women to use the learning acquired

to train other women in their communities so that the skills can cascade to all levels of society. Omer Mawla, Locality Commissioner, Kateela locality, expressed his appreciation for the Mission's continuous support to women's groups in the locality and affirmed that the project will contribute positively to environment preservation in the area.

Kalotom Hussein, Head, Women's Union, Kateela locality, requested more support from UNAMID for women-focused projects in the area, particularly the construction of a women's centre. ■

UNAMID hands over women center to local community in West Jebel Marra, Central Darfur



UNAMID Sector Central handed over a building, Women's Center and Meeting Hall, to the local community in Nertiti, West Jebel Marra Locality in Central Darfur. The project is part of the Mission's continued efforts to empower women and improve their working environment and wellbeing. Photo by Kone Mouroulaye, UNAMID.

On 30 May 2017, UNAMID Sector Central handed over a constructed Women's Center and Meeting Hall to the local community in Nertiti, West Jebel Marra Locality in Central Darfur. The project, implemented as a Quick Impact Project (QIP) is part of the Mission's continued efforts to empower women and improve their working environment and wellbeing.

Speaking at the occasion, UNAMID Sector Central Commander, Brigadier General Kamrul Islam noted that the Women's Center will foster peaceful coexistence and lasting peace among the people in the locality. He commended the cooperation that exists between UNAMID and the Government of Su-

dan, stating that it is "through such cooperation and shared vision that many achievements have been realized in the locality, through hard work and determination by the people of Sudan." In her remarks, as representative of UNAMID's QIP Secretariat, Ms. Yousra El Ghorayeb, Civil Affairs Team Leader in Sector Central, explained that the project aims to address pressing community needs for a common meeting place for women and is a platform for building confidence amongst the host community on the Mission's mandate. Ms. El Ghorayeb described the completed project as a good example of the cooperation between civil society, local authorities and UNAMID.

The Acting Commissioner of Western Jebel Marra Locality, Mr. Hassabo Ahmed Musa, who represented local government at the handover ceremony, thanked UNAMID for constructing the Women's Center and for the continued support from the Mission on other projects implemented in the locality.

The representative of Women in Nertiti Locality, Ms. Asha Abdallah, extended her gratitude to UNAMID for its continued support to women in Western Jebel Marra Locality and requested additional assistance with furnishing the newly constructed Women's Center.

UNAMID has implemented around 120 Quick Impact projects in Central Darfur over the last five years. ■

“We must uphold the human essence in every Darfuri” —An interview with Deputy Joint Special Representative-Protection, Bintou Keita

UNAMID’s Deputy Joint Special Representative, Bintou Keita, speaks to Voices of Darfur about the uniqueness of her current job, how she defines the Mission’s protection of civilians mandate and the warmth and love she has experienced from the people living in this conflict-torn region.

BY EMMANUEL EMASEALU

Bintou Keita was appointed as Deputy Joint Special Representative in charge of UNAMID’s Protection of Civilians pillar in November 2015. Since then she has hit the ground running, traversing through the length and breadth of Darfur, interacting with its people and demonstrating her own special brand of hands-on peacekeeping.

In this candid interview with Voices of Darfur, Ms. Keita shares her views on the quest for sustainable peace across this conflict-ridden land, gender issues at the workplace and the importance of every individual embracing the concept of a better tomorrow for the people of Darfur.

VoD: Your appointment in 2015 as DJSR in charge of the Protection pillar is an inspiration for women in the United Nations and elsewhere. What does this appointment mean to you? Do you see this as a call to duty, a problem-solving opportunity or even as a challenge that must be confronted?

DJSR Keita: It is a mixed bag. I was appointed in November 2015 as soon as I finished serving in West Africa during the Ebola crisis. I was very happy to come to Darfur for several reasons. First of all, three times in my career I had been called to work in Darfur and all three times I had considered it not the opportune moment because I had young children and was not sure if it was the best move at the time. The second consideration is the interesting fact that I am being interviewed by Voices of Darfur. It is very interesting to me because when I was sixteen years old, I thought of becoming “a voice for Africa”, someday. So, being interviewed by Voices of Darfur, one region in Africa, is interesting. Perhaps, someday, I could become a voice for Africa as a continent. Another reason why my appointment is a source of joy is that I have been serving in the UN since 1987 in different countries, including my own country, Guinea Conakry.

In the context of this Mission, there is something unique about it. There is the uniqueness of working for both the United Nations and the African Union. So, I said to myself, perhaps, this is an opportunity provided by the African Union to learn more about my continent. So, I would describe my appointment as a mixed bag because it is a call to duty in my professional capacity and a source of joy to me, personally. It is the combination of these considerations that make me happy that the Secretary-General appointed me to this position.

I even found my designation, the title of Deputy Joint Special Representative for Protection, interesting. Initially, I thought of protection in the sense of my previous experience as UNICEF Representative or even in the context of the peacebuilding Mission in Burundi. But here, I have come to understand that protection has a very different meaning. I have worked in a





UNAMID's Deputy JSR-Protection, Bintou Keita, visits El Daein, East Darfur. She was received at the airport by community leaders, women's rights activists, state ministers and others active in the political arena. Photo by Abdurashed Yakubu, UNAMID.

number of conflict and post-conflict countries but never in a place where you also work with the military and police components who are dealing with the physical protection of civilians. What I was familiar with was the rule of law, child protection and women protection. But this is the first time I have had to be involved in providing physical protection to civilians which also includes the environment. Even the context of the new environment

presents a unique situation in Africa as both the African Union and the United Nations are partnering to engage with the Sudanese authorities in a bid to restore peace to a place which has been known for quite some time to present a tarnished image of what Africa stands for. I also find my appointment interesting because I understand the scars and the wounds of the people having also worked in Rwanda in 2004, ten years after the genocide.

So, to answer your question in a nutshell, I see my appointment as UNAMID DJSR in charge of the Protection Pillar as an inspiration for women generally, a call to duty and a good opportunity to contribute my quota in the effort to solve the situation in Darfur. Indeed, my appointment could rightfully be described as a challenge that must not be shied away from but confronted.

VoD: You have expressed that there is a difference in perception

of how the protection of civilians mandate is handled in Darfur compared to how protection is handled in other conflict and post conflict regions. What is this difference?

DJSR Keita: The difference is that in other posts, I did not work with the military and the police to provide protection of the civilians. The only time I worked with the military and the police was during the fight against Ebola. There were no arms because this was not fighting

another person or an enemy but fighting a virus. We had military and police expertise. But this is the first time I see people in uniform carrying weapons and playing the role of preventing or deterring attacks. This is new to me.

VoD: You have served in several senior management and leadership positions with the United Nations in Chad, Congo, Madagascar, Cape Verde, Rwanda, Burundi, New York, Sierra Leone, Guinea and now, Darfur. What would you consider to be your personal achievements in the discharge of your duty as DJSR - Protection in UNAMID?

DJSR Keita: I would say it is a bit early to assess personal achievements. But from the comments I receive, most people are not used to having, quote and unquote, "VIPs" at my level going to the deep field, connecting with the people, running around in the Mission Headquarters or even going to the sectors to meet the people. For me, this is part of the job. You cannot understand if you are not mixing with the people. You must mingle with the people to understand their thinking, gauge their temperament, determine what they represent, ascertain their dreams and despair, and also engage them in dialogue in order to further your own understanding and vision of what their needs are. I believe that this is why we are here, to support and serve the people. I would say that this is a personal working style.

In the end, it is transforming the lives of people that matters and you do this by connecting, communicating, dialoguing, advocating and by

relating to the people through your physical presence even when language may appear to be a barrier. Indeed, there is a non-verbal language which I use to connect with the people everywhere I go. I believe in connecting with the people and this makes the difference.

VoD: In your current role as DJSR, have you met with any challenges, both as a woman and a leader? If so, how did you deal with such challenges?

DJSR Keita: Well, in every professional journey, one is bound to encounter challenges. In my current role, I have had to unpack and display what protection means. This Mission has the unique mandate of the protection of civilians. Because my title reflects protection, people tend to confuse the overall mandate of the Mission (which is the protection of civilians) with the personality of DJSR (Protection) as appointed by the Secretary-General and it only happens that I am a woman, a leader. It should not mean that my position is a secondary role because I am not a man. Sometimes, one's performance can be assessed through the gender lens, consequently one is expected to deal with 'soft' issues; it is often a perception that women should deal with soft issues and not weighty political issues. But actually, the role in itself means that one is dealing with politics, negotiation, and every other thing which at the end should bring about the protection of the rights of the citizens of Darfur in the context of their communities. It is all about bringing peace at the end.

VoD: Do you have any special



UNAMID Deputy Joint Special Representative-Protection, Bintou Keita -- accompanied by senior Mission staff and members of the local authority -- launched a number of community stabilization projects in the Shattaya locality, South Darfur, On 7 May 2017. The projects, which aim to support community socio-economic development and local government structures, include construction of a rural court and prosecution office, along with the rehabilitation of a police station and 10 water pumps. Photo by Mutaz Munafal, UNAMID.

“You must mingle with the people to understand their thinking, gauge their temperament, determine what they represent, ascertain their dreams and despair, and also engage them in dialogue in order to further your own understanding and vision of what their needs are.”

message for the people of Darfur whom you interact with, literally, on a daily basis?

DJSR Keita: In the context of the recent message of the UN Secretary-General on International Day of UN Peacekeepers, I would say to Darfuri men, women and children that the peacekeepers are here because it is a calling. It is their duty and obligation to serve the continent and in this regard, they are serving Darfur with zeal and commitment.

So, how do we walk the talk? It is by trying as much as possible each day to rise above the wounds and scars in order to pursue peace in every endeavour through our attitude and behaviour and through the words we use. We

must uphold the human essence in every Darfuri or anyone having dealings with Darfur. We must do this because we care and because tomorrow is best prepared for, today. I know life can be very difficult particularly when the basic social amenities are not available. But one thing I notice, virtually everywhere I go and which makes me very emotional, is that despite the poverty, despite the challenges, people are still welcoming and warm. We cannot put a value tag to this. This is the gem that must be treasured in spite of the absence of certain material things. These are the values that would help us to carry on and must be bequeathed to generations to come. So, the message I would like



UNAMID's Community Stabilization Section handed over a computer lab to the Sudan Open University in El Fasher, North Darfur. The project is part of the Mission's Community-based Labour-intensive Projects (CLIPs) program aimed at building the youth capacity, in a bid to prevent them from resorting to violence, substance-abuse, or other anti-social activities, across Darfur. In the photo DJSR Bintu Keita shakes hands with Government officials and University Doctors. Photo by Mohamad Almahady, UNAMID.

to give to my fellow brothers and sisters in Darfur, is the importance of preparing for tomorrow in the context of all seeking durable and sustainable peace.

VoD: You have just made two powerful philosophical submissions. The first is that the best time to prepare for tomorrow is today. The second is the philosophical message of hope, hope that nobody should give up, hope that when tomorrow comes, thing will be better. How is your daily routine as DJSR -Protection?

DJSR Keita: (Laughs) I will tell you a story. On one occasion, I went to the field with some members of Mission staff including Zakaria, one of our interpreters. Zakaria is a great guy. Somebody

came to me with the feedback that they understand I could work from early morning to very late in the night and not bother about eating or doing anything else. However, Zakaria wanted me to kindly note and remember that other people needed a break so they could eat and be refreshed.

I understand that my daily routine is very tough. For me, I just keep carrying on. I have the energy. My energy level increases as the day evolves. Those around me in the office wonder at the hectic schedule I keep which includes a lot of travelling. I thank God because I believe that the energy we expend in responding to our calling is not coming as a result of what we do in terms of taking care of ourselves.

The energy is coming from above.

VoD: You have said that the best time to prepare for tomorrow is today. In specific terms, what is your message for Darfur in preparing for tomorrow, today?

DJSR Keita: I believe we should lay down all the weapons that are in our minds because the weapons outside are a reflection of the weapons that we have inside. This is the message I want to give. If everyone works on himself then it is possible to attain peace. I believe that this is what we all, including Darfuris, should be doing no matter what the challenges and difficulties are. It is my general thinking that men, women and young people in Darfur states must have seen reason not to continue fighting.

Mariam--giving women a voice in Darfur's peace process

Mariam Adam Hussein is an inspiration to many women across West Darfur in her role as a leader for displaced women as well as her conviction that every individual must contribute to the peace process across the region.

BY MATILDA MOYO

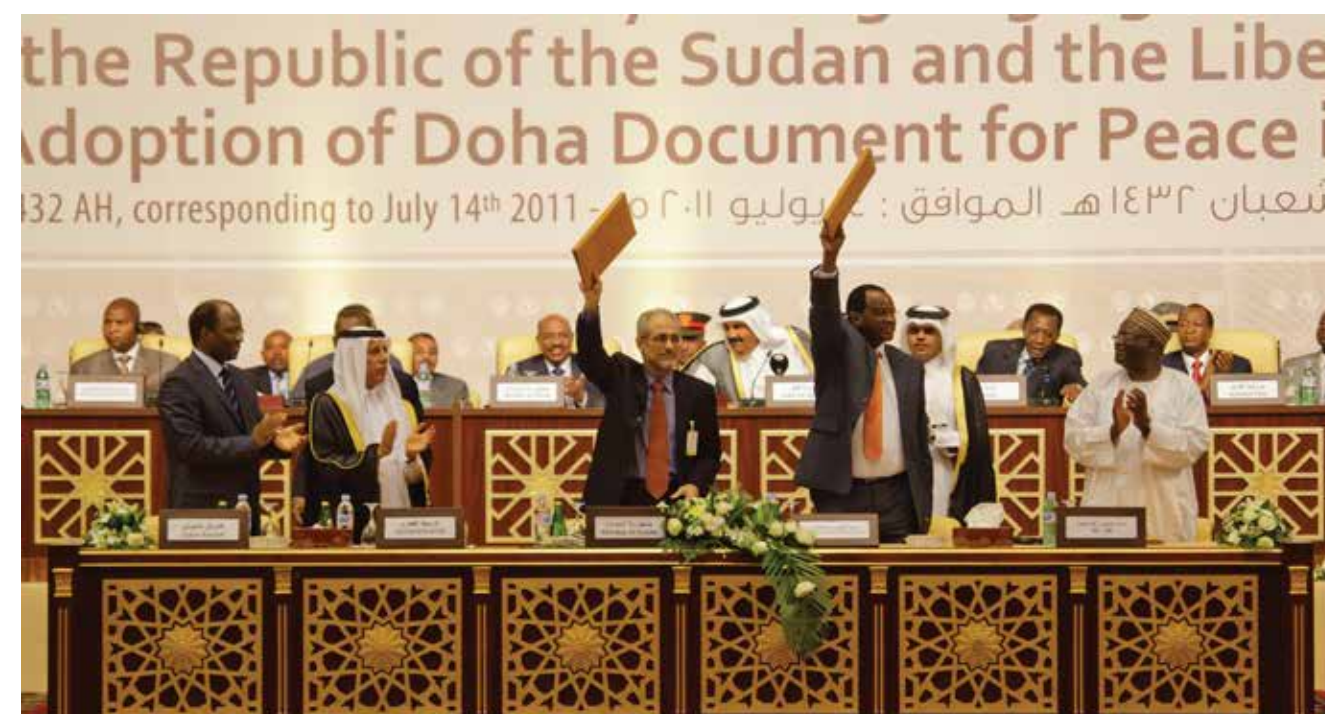
MARIAM ADAM HUSSEIN has become a household name in West Darfur, as she is among the women that have dedicated their lives to contributing towards peace in the region. This is a major achievement for a woman in a place like Darfur, where women are still conspicuously absent from decision-making processes.

Driven by hope and the conviction that peace is not only possible, but also important for the advancement of Darfur, Mariam has been involved in the peace process at various levels.

Mariam is currently the Chairperson for West Darfur State internally displaced persons (IDP) Women's Union, a post she has held since 2009. She is also the Head Woman Sheik at Abuzar IDP Camp.

"I believe that peace is essential for providing a decent life for all human beings," she says, noting with concern that women in IDP camps are unhappy and struggling to cope with life.

Over the years, Mariam has been engaged in advocating for



Signatories to the Doha Document for Peace in Darfur (DDPD) celebrate following the formal signing of the document on 14 July, 2011 in Doha, Qatar. Photo by Olivier Chassot, UNAMID.

the rights of displaced women and ensuring that their voice is heard.

Being a wife and a mother of eight children (five boys and three girls), Mariam understands the needs of the women she represents.

Born in Nory, West Darfur in 1969, Mariam was displaced from there in 2003 and moved to El Geneina town where she currently lives. After completing higher secondary school, Mariam engaged in various income generating initiatives such as making bricks among other activities.

However, her passion for change propelled her to get involved in activities where she could make a difference, such as the peace process during the Doha Document for Peace in Darfur (DDPD). She was a key participant at all Doha peace talk forums.

"On behalf of IDPs and refugees, we engaged in the peace negotiation in Doha 1, 2 and 3. I represented IDP women and was selected with two other IDPs to

participate in the negotiations," she says, adding that some of the issues of concern that she raised included women's rights, as well as the impact of armed conflict and displacement on women.

During her participation in the negotiations, she and two other IDP representatives contributed to some articles that were included in the peace document under the supervision of the international community. Mariam believes this inclusivity is one of the reasons why the people of Darfur embraced and feel a sense of ownership over the DDPD.

"Our participation in the negotiation was in the interests of peace and we conveyed our message, but unfortunately the DDPD is not fully implemented on the ground so we are still living in IDP camps," she says.

While acknowledging that the DDPD is an acceptable to most people, Mariam notes that there are many challenges facing its im-

"I would like to take this opportunity to call upon the government authorities to ensure existence of a secure environment, provide basic social services like schools, hospitals and recreation places for the youth to encourage the IDPs to move back to their villages."



A ceremony in Doha, Qatar where the Doha Document for Peace in Darfur (DDPD) was signed on 14 July, 2011. Mariam participated in the DDPD discussions as a representative of the internally displaced persons community in West Darfur. Photo by Olivier Chassot, UNAMID.

“I believe that peace is essential for providing a decent life for all human beings.”

plementation. Among these challenges is the proliferation of fire arms, which affect security and thus prevent IDPs from returning to their villages of origin.

Women, she says, are most vulnerable to the insecurity as they risk mental and physical harassment including rape while engaging in daily chores like cultivating their farms or collecting grass and fire wood.

“Most of the people in Darfur are still carrying arms,” she notes, adding that in her view, even if IDPs and those in villages

were fully supported and provided with basic social services, they would still be reluctant to return because of insecurity, despite their deep desire to go back to their areas of origin.

“In fact, there are some people who have returned voluntarily to their villages, but the problem is there are no basic services. I would like to take this opportunity to call upon the government authorities to ensure existence of a secure environment, provide basic social services like schools, hospitals and recreation places

“Women can actively engage in the peace process through the programmes that have been set in the DDPD



Mariam Adam Hussein (right) is interviewed for Voices of Darfur Magazine in El Geneina, West Darfur. Photo by Muntasir Sharafadin, UNAMID.

for the youth to encourage the IDPs to move back to their villages” she implores.

She acknowledges support provided to IDPs by UNAMID and its partner organizations, as well as the boosting of security through patrols and mechanisms for displaced people to report the problems they encounter in their daily lives.

Mariam currently works at Abuzar IDP camp’s Health Center as a Health Educator under the state Ministry of Health and has been involved in various decision-making roles within West Darfur. She served in West Darfur’s State Legislative Council under different portfolios, as a Member of Women Legislators from 2012 to 2013 and as Head of the Agriculture and Animal Resources Committee. She is also a member of West Darfur’s State Women Follow-up Mechanism, on the International Women’s Day and sits on the UN-SCR 1325 Committee.

Despite her contribution, Mariam feels that women’s participation in decision making positions and peace negotiations is still

quite inadequate and not commensurate with the heavy involvement of women in most social aspects at the grass-roots level. For example, she says, there is only one woman in West Darfur’s state Cabinet. Mariam argues that women’s participation and representation in key decision making positions should be increased considering that they constitute half of the population.

“In my opinion, women can actively engage in the peace process through the programmes that have been set in the DDPD,” Mariam added.

Despite the challenges, Mariam still hopes that the peace agreement will be wholly implemented on the ground so that all the IDPs can return safely to their areas of origin. However, she believes for this to be achieved, the Government of Sudan needs to disarm all people and leave the weapons only with the security apparatuses.

“I hope that peace will prevail in Sudan, especially in Darfur, so that all the people can enjoy a good life,” she says.



More than 20 Sudan rural court judges and officials took part in a dispute settlement workshop in El Fasher, North Darfur. The three-day workshop from 21-23 May 2017, was supported by UNAMID's Rule of Law Section in partnership with the training department of the Sudan Judiciary and the North Darfur Judiciary. Similar workshops -- for rural court judges, prosecutors and police Investigators -- have been conducted in El Geneina, West Darfur and El Daein, East Darfur. Photo by Mohamad Almahady, UNAMID.

Reinforcing rule of law by building capacity of national mechanisms

UNAMID's Rule of Law Section works in partnership with Sudan National Judicial authorities and Attorney General Office to improve the rule of law in Darfur by promoting mediation efforts to resolve conflicts by building the capacity of justice institutions, such as rural courts for mediation of disputes, prosecution offices and prison services across Darfur

BY SALAH MOHAMMED

Across Darfur, the traditional criminal justice mechanism, commonly known as 'Judiya', is based on local customs and traditions. Rural courts which utilize the 'Judiya' system have,

historically, played a significant role in the early resolution of community conflicts across the region, through mediation activities. In most cases, conflicts are caused by seemingly mi-

nor disputes, such as livestock theft or disputes over ownership of small properties. This informal justice system often helps solve inter-communal conflicts by empowering native

community leaders known as umdas who preside over such rural courts. Local native administration is, thus, the lynchpin of this system and criminal justice is mostly based on the involved parties agreeing to a compromise solution.

Salahudden Abbas, Chief Judge, North Darfur, is of the view that rural court judges play an important role in resolving disputes amicably. Francoise Simard, Head, Rule of Law, UNAMID Rule of Law expresses of a similar view. "Mediation, unlike other forms of litigation, is by far the least costly, better understood by ordinary

people and more expeditious mode of resolving disputes, whether between individuals or communities," says Ms. Simard.

Increasingly, however, most judicial officials are of the opinion that traditional justice systems across Darfur need to operate in synchronicity with state or federal laws to facilitate early and amicable resolution community conflicts, without involving formal courts which, in reality, are available only in towns and cities.

UNAMID, through its Rule of Law section, Justice Advisory Unit (JAU) continues to support the Govern-

ment of Sudan's efforts to enhance the capacity of rural court judges in Darfur. For instance, in 2015 and 2017 UNAMID, in conjunction with Sudan federal judiciary authorities, conducted a trainings course for rural courts judges across states of Darfur. This training empowered participating judges to mediate disputes that could have escalated into armed conflicts which would have resulted in loss of lives and property.

Other success stories have been recorded by rural courts. The Coordinator of rural courts in North Darfur stated recently that an armed inter-communal conflict which erupted in Mellit between the Berti and Zayadiya tribes and resulted in fatalities on both sides, was resolved through the intervention of community leaders, including rural court judges. Growing confidence and trust in rural courts, which started functioning in earnest recently after years of hibernation due to the ongoing Darfur conflict and the willingness of Darfuris to resort to legal means to resolve their disputes, is beginning to fully reflect in the host community. Therefore, building the capacity of the rural courts to enable them to mediate conflicts and disputes in their communities remains a key priority of the Mission's Rule of Law Section. In this regard, an intermediate training course was organized in May 2017, for the rural court judges and judicial officers in Darfur on the principles of amicable means for settlement of disputes.

The criminal justice system currently faces a number of challenges. This includes the fact that existent rule of law efforts are still characterized by a climate of impunity and lawlessness which leads to weak state



law enforcement mechanisms or weak justice institutions. The absence of sufficient personnel, such as police, prosecutors and defense lawyers, particularly in the more remote areas of Darfur, means that people in those areas have no access to formal justice institutions and they resort to illegal means or violence to resolve disputes mechanisms.. The Rule of law section, Justice Advisory Unit in 2017, conducted workshops and trainings for Prosecutors and Judicial police for better investigation and prosecutions of cases, across two Darfur states. The section also supported construction of infrastructure of prosecution offices through Quick Impact Projects (QIP'S). Also apart from the main cities, justice infrastructure

is generally very poor and in many remote areas, the different components of the criminal justice system are compelled to share premises. The lack of knowledge of the law and human rights remains a great barrier to people accessing justice. Also the fear of reprisal from perpetrators has also prevented many victims of sexual and gender based violence and human rights violations from reporting cases to law enforcement and the justice system. This has necessitated the need for complaint mechanisms which are independent from detention and enforcement authorities and are empowered to receive, investigate and take appropriate action on allegations of torture, cruel, inhuman or degrading treat-

ment or punishment. The strengthening of prosecution mechanisms in Darfur will go a long way to prevent the culture of impunity and to provide justice to victims of crimes. The work of UNAMID Rule of law section is important in Darfur as it assist the justice institutions including courts, prosecution, police, prison officials etc., to strengthen their institutional capacity for an independent and accountable justice system that delivers justice and empowers the people of Darfur, especially the vulnerable, to enjoy access to justice and encourage them to demand other fundamental human rights. Rule of law can also address drivers of conflict by supporting equitable governance of land and ensuring that

land issues are addressed through the justice system and resolved amicably through mediations and conciliations and the Rule of law section thus provides assistance to rural courts and local conflict resolution mechanisms to provide justice by settlement of disputes before they escalate to major conflicts. During the earlier years the section also organized workshops for lawyers, paralegals, tutorial sessions for law students, civil authorities and facilitated the movement of justice actors across Darfur including transportation of witnesses to court. The section also do court monitoring of sensational cases. UNAMID Rule of Law Section also provides support to the local criminal system through its Prison Advisory

1 UNAMID Rule of Law - Prisons Advisory unit handed over two elevated water tank towers and an underground water storage to Shallah Federal Prison, in El Fasher, north Darfur, on 30 November 2015. The initiative is part of the mission's Quick Impact Projects (QIPs) and provides water to the prisoners and the surrounding communities, including Shallah basic school. Photo by Mohamad Almahady, UNAMID.

2 UNAMID's Rule of Law Section organized on 14 November 2016, a two-week capacity building workshop in collaboration with the state central prison administration for 30 prison officers in Nyala, South Darfur. The training aims at enhancing the skills of the prisons' officers to improve treatment and care of inmates, in accordance with basic international human rights standards. Photo by Mutaz Munafal, UNAMID.

3 UNAMID's Rule of Law Section and the State Prisons Administration held on 5 October 2016, a trade certification ceremony marking the conclusion of a two-year vocational training programme in welding and metal works for prisoners at the Shallah Federal Prison, North Darfur. The project, which is part of the Mission's support to prisons administration across Darfur, aims at empowering offenders with livelihood skills for effective community reintegration. Photo by Salah Mohammed, UNAMID.



UNAMID's Rule of Law Section, in collaboration with the State Prisons Administration and State Ministry of Health, concluded on 8 December 2016, a two-day health awareness campaign on HIV/AIDS at Kheir Khanaga Women's Prison and Shallah Federal Prison in El Fasher, North Darfur. The event, part of the Mission's support to state prisons, aimed at sensitizing prison inmates and staff on Voluntary Confidential Counseling and Testing (VCCT). Photo by Salah Mohammed, UNAMID.

Unit. The current local criminal justice system is facing many challenges such as lack of institutional independence of the prisons system, coupled with lack of policies and procedures to provide guidance on the operationalization of the legal provision on prisons and attacks by armed groups on prisons which led to the closer of two prisons in Kutum and Buram. Additionally there is inadequately trained prison staff to manage the prisons facilities in accordance with the international standards, and lack of adequate rehabilitation programs for the provision of skills training to inmates. "The Government of Sudan has made efforts to increase the capacity of the judiciary, prisons system in the urban cities, but in the localities the situation is different as there is no functioning justice," Ms. Simard says.

UNAMID Rule of Law is focusing its justice and correction intervention on supporting the reestablishment of the criminal justice chain in areas to which displaced persons return, thereby contributing to the stabiliza-

tion and the protection of the returnee population. In prison areas it is providing correctional intervention for enhanced human and prison security, and professional prison management in priority areas of return.

To re-establish and strengthen the criminal justice chain in Darfur, UNAMID Rule of Law facilitates training on conduct of investigations in a fair and impartial manner for the collection of evidence, investigation skills, and investigation on the critical need to respect human rights standards for prosecutors and police investigators.

With The Five-year Strategic Development Plan for Darfur Prisons (2014-2018) on hand, coupled with the recent adoption of the Standard Operating Procedures on various aspects of prisons management, the Rule of Law Section continues its key interventions in prisons by ensuring a professional system where the basic rights of prisoners are respected and a conducive atmosphere provided for prisoners to serve their sentences. In this regards UNAMID has provided

training in proper human rights approach to prison management and human rights responsibilities to over 600 in-service and newly recruited prisons officers. This training has contributed to improved management and operations particularly in the area of treatment and care of prisoners. Consequently, there are reduced human rights violations as prison staff have enhanced skills and knowledge which enable them to provide humane treatment and care to offenders. Training has also assisted in improving security in prisons leading to fewer security incidents.

UNAMID Rule of Law, in collaboration with other stakeholders in North Darfur, has provided an avenue for 40 inmates at Kheir Khanaga Prison in El Fasher to engage in various vocational skills training programmes, including 15 prisoners trained in handcraft manufacture, 15 in tailoring and 10 in bead making. Such livelihood skills are crucial for women in Darfur, most of whom are breadwinners for their families. The



UNAMID's Rule of Law Unit, in collaboration with the State Prisons Administration, organized on 28 November 2016, a two-week training course on management and operation of prisons for 30 government police officers in El Fasher, North Darfur. Photo by Mohamad Almahady, UNAMID.

vocational training offered is part of the reformation programme for inmates aimed at equipping them with income-generating skill.

Through UNAMID-supported rehabilitation and reformation programmes, a total of 350 prisoners have benefitted from this project, some of whom have resettled within their communities and are able to sustain their livelihoods through self-employment. This certification is very important as it will enable inmates compete favourably with others of similar trade skills in the outside world especially if they decide to look for employment in the formal sector.

UNAMID, through its Quick Impact Projects (QIPs) and Community-based Labor-intensive Projects (CLIPs) has also supported the refurbishment of 12 prisons and one Reformatory Juvenile Home across Darfur. These facilities provide a humane, safe and secure environment for prisoners. A QIP was conceived and constructed comprising one shelter; increasing the height of a perimeter wall, a visiting bay; a child

friendly space and one guard room in the Shallah Federal Prison to accommodate female prisoners who have been relocated from the Kheir Khanaga Prison. Such facilities have significantly improved the conditions of the female inmates and their accompanying children, thereby strengthening security and improving prison conditions. These efforts have helped to create a humane, safe and secure prison environment thus addressing life threatening conditions in the prisons.

It is important to have strong and independent criminal justice institutions which respect and act in accordance with the law, human rights and international standards, are ratified by Sudan, and must always be taken into account at all stages of the justice process.

The capacity development of national staff in all criminal justice components and law enforcement organs also helps justice and sustainable peace because it ensures access to justice and equality before the law, and interpretation of the laws and

functioning of judiciary in combating impunity. This is because no crime will remain unpunished and perpetrators will face criminal sanctions in accordance with the law.

The cause of sustainable peace across Darfur will be well served by equal treatment for all people in the eyes of the law. Having competent and adequate number of trained judges, enhancing the capacity of rural court judges for effective mediation of disputes and community conflicts, a well-functioning formal court system with sufficient infrastructure, increasing the capacity of prosecutors for better investigations and prosecutions, a humane, safe and secure prison system and finding ways to incorporate traditional mediation systems, such as Judiya, into state law systems will ensure effective and functioning of rule of law with respect to the judiciary. While UNAMID Rule of Law continues its efforts in supporting local justice and prison systems to attain this improved level of functionality for the benefit of all Darfuris, a lot more remains to be done.

UNAMID Outreach: Peace Through Sports

Sport is one of the most effective tools in strengthening ties and enhancing relations between communities and at different strata of society. Sports cuts across social barriers and brings people together in a harmonized fashion, regardless of their social status, ethnic or political affiliations.

The United Nations – African Union Mission in Darfur (UNAMID) recognizes the significance of sports in restoring peace, stability and resettlement among conflicted communities in the Darfur region, its area of responsibility. Annual-

ly, the Mission’s Communication and Public Information Section (CPIS) organizes at least fifteen regular sporting events across Darfuri villages, towns, cities and especially in Camps for internally displaced persons (IDPs). These activities which are aimed at promoting the spirit of peaceful coexistence target Darfuri youth as the activities provide a veritable platform for their active participation in events that promote networking as well as enhance human health. Sports also provides youth with the opportunity to learn health and vocational skills as well as offers them viable alternatives to engaging in unproductive ventures or identifying with shady characters in society. Horsemanship, for instance, has a very noble value in society because it is associated with advocating for the weak, defending honor and protecting the vulnerable in the Darfuri society.

Sporting activities which include football, volleyball, horseracing and camel racing are unique cultural elements capable of bringing communities together rather than divide them. UNAMID CPIS utilizes these grassroots level sporting competitions to disseminate the message of peace amongst local communities.





Yehia Adam Mohammed, the South Darfur-based artist, at his studio in Nyala. Photo by Saeed Salim, UNAMID.

Art as a tool of Peace: Interview with artist Yehia Mohammed

Nyala-based artist, Yehia Adam Mohammed, speaks of the art scene in South Darfur, what inspires him and the role of local artists in bringing about social peace and cohesion in Darfur.

BY SAEED SALIM

Yehia Mohammed was born in New Halfa, eastern Sudan, on 6 January 1975. His family migrated before his birth from Kulbus, West Darfur, to New Halfa, a town known for its fertile lands, where they became farmers.

Mr. Adam, was drawn to painting from childhood and went on to study fine arts at the Design Department, Aljazeera University, Sudan. After graduating, he moved back to Darfur and settled in Nyala. Mr. Adam helms an art workshop where he undertakes graphic design work and also educates children in art, enabling

them to paint with a purpose—establishing peace across Darfur.

Voices of Darfur spoke with Mr. Adam about his experiences working with children and how art has the potential to play a crucial role in educating Darfuri people regarding sustainable peace across this troubled region.

Voices of Darfur (VoD): When did you start painting?

Mr. Adam: I started painting when I joined the kindergarten school in New Halfa. We used to draw using clay; later I joined the

Design Department, Aljazeera University in an effort to receive a formal degree in art.

VoD: What does the fine arts mean to you?

Mr. Adam: The fine arts, signify a reflection of life, love and tolerance.

VoD: In your opinion, do you believe that Darfuri people attach special value to the fine arts?

Mr. Adam: Definitely yes! Darfuris naturally love colour and use them in their daily life, be it in their attire, their houses. Furthermore, Darfuris also greatly enjoy music

and dancing. They find it easy to interact with all types of art.

VoD: How can artists use their work to convey peace messages across Darfur?

Mr. Adam: Art, in its different forms, can function as a powerful tool to convey messages related to bringing about social peace and harmonious coexistence. It elevates human values and contributes to fostering tolerance among different communities in Darfur.

VoD: Have you portrayed the reality of Darfur after the conflict started in your work?

Mr. Adam: Yes, though only partially. In most of my paintings, one can see that peace dominates as a theme. Currently, I am working on a project in which I want to reflect the transformation from war to peace.

VoD: What in your opinion, is the most inspiring aspect of Darfuri life that you have depicted in your current project?

Mr. Adam: I find that Darfuris wear extremely colourful attire and this makes them, visually, almost a multi-coloured community. Immense diversity in terms of culture is reflected in the local costumes of this region. I find this inspiring and an indication that Darfuris are naturally artistic, expressing their cultural diversity through their clothes.

VoD: How can this rich cultural diversity play an effective role in maintaining a social fabric that could lead to sustainable peace?

Mr. Adam: Darfuris are a ceremonial, festive community. They celebrate all occasions—a good harvest, weddings, circumcisions, farewells and so forth. This celebratory zeal finds expression through music, songs, poetry and drama. Therefore, art is a primary medium through which we can send messages on peaceful coexistence between the different ethnic groups living in Darfur.

VoD: Tell us about your work with children in Nyala.

Mr. Adam: The idea originated when I organized a workshop on the use of colour and its significance in



Artist Yehia Adam Mohammed is pictured displaying his paints at his studio in Nyala, South Darfur. Photo by Saeed Salim, UNAMID.

painting for the students of a basic school in Medani town, Aljazeera State. During the workshop, children identified topics they wanted to draw; young children are naturally artistic. I merely taught them how to mix colours and fill in the empty gaps. The workshop was so successful that I replicated it in Nyala where children from different schools drew and painted subjects of their own choice. I was amazed by the imagination and vision of these children.

Based on this, I decided to make young children draw on the walls of

“It is time now for the artists to express in their artworks the real peace that all the Darfuris are awaiting for a long time to come.



A painting created by artist, Yehia Adam Mohammed. Photo by Saeed Salim, UNAMID.

the public streets in Nyala town. I wanted to fill the empty walls with paintings that reflect children's perceptions on life, peace, combatting harmful practices, reviving Darfuri cultural heritage and consolidating Darfuri identity. This dates back to historically peaceful relationships between different ethnic groups in Darfur. I wanted to show the speciality of Darfur by reflecting African-Arab mixed colours to create a rich picture full of warm colours.

VoD: In your opinion, how can we bring back, by using art, a smile on the faces of Darfuri children who have suffered for more than a decade due to the ongoing conflict here?

Mr. Adam: Art can be used to address children's psychological needs. Their drawings usually are an accurate reflection of their inner feelings. If we work towards creating a peaceful, healthy community where the arts are enjoyed, I can assure you, every child will be smiling.

VoD: What was your first impression of the drawings created by the children in Nyala?

Mr. Adam: I was totally stunned! Even trained adult artists could not do better. This proves that children are artists by nature! The only thing they need

“It is time for the Darfuri to exercise their arts and rituals and go back to normality.”

is tools. Their imagination is limitless.

VoD: Do your future plans include any plans of organising an exhibition reflecting the Darfur crisis and its humanitarian consequences?

Mr. Adam: Actually, I do, but I don't want this exhibition to be in an enclosed gallery space. Instead I would want to be held at a public yard or a market space in one of the displaced camps.

VoD: Tell us a bit about the current art scene in South Darfur.

Mr. Adam: Traditional arts, which include, but are not limited to, singing, dancing, engraving, carving and handicrafts with locally made materials are the most common arts in Darfur; South Darfur is no exception to this. Additionally, modern music, acting and painting are also being practiced by the younger generation nowadays.

VoD: Has Sudanese art been influenced by art from neighboring countries?

Mr. Adam: Because of the open borders between Sudan and neighboring countries, there has always been interactions between Sudanese culture and the cultures of these countries which, have definitely, influenced Sudanese and Darfuri culture. A new, mixed culture between Arabic and African cultures has emerged, giving Sudan its current cultural identity.

VoD: Are there any active, well-known female artists in Nyala?

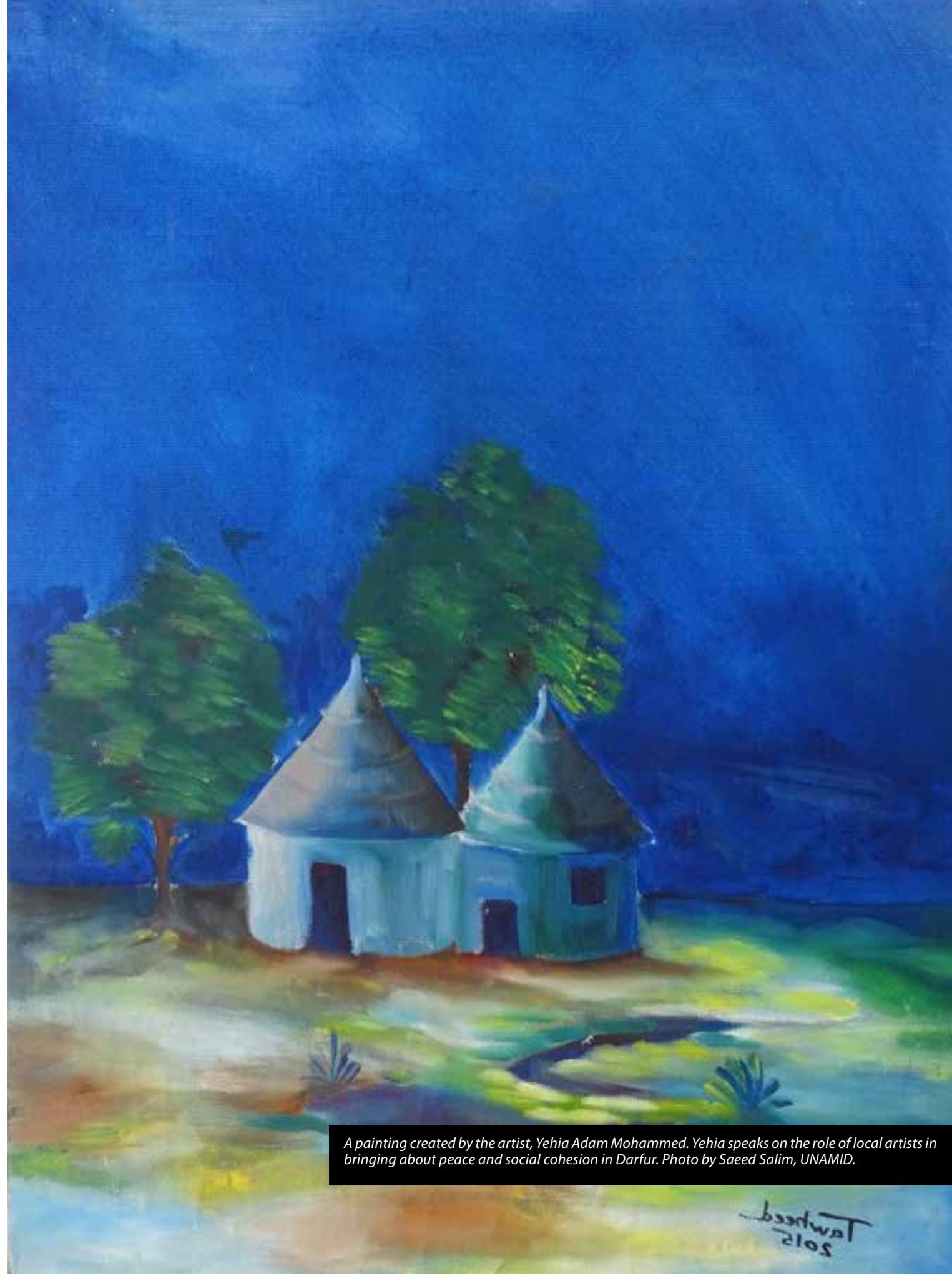
Mr. Adam: Traditionally, Darfuri women excelled in singing, dancing and handicrafts. It is the women of Darfur, who historically, encouraged men to go to wars and cultivate farms through their songs. Women's songs also lamented the lack of social cohesion and ongoing conflict, calling for peace. Two good examples of Darfuri female singers are Mariam Ammo and Hawwa Ramadan, who are well known across Sudan. Nowadays, women have actively participating and creating their own art, expressing their hopes and aspirations regarding development and stability.

VoD: Tell us a bit about the local art industry in Nyala.

Mr. Adam: Art as an industry does not as yet exist in Darfur on a large scale. However, local arts such as food coverings, mats and ornamental pottery are sold widely. A famous area is Menawashe village, located some 75 kilometers north of Nyala, where locally made artistic materials are sold. Nyala has held art exhibitions for Darfuri arts which bring together most Darfuri ethnic groups to display their traditional arts.

VoD: Do you think the current situation in Darfur is conducive for art to contribute to the cause of peace, development and stability?

Mr. Adam: There will be no art if there is no peace! It is time now for artists to depict the comprehensive peace that all Darfuris have aspired to for a long time. It is time for the ongoing conflict to stop and for Darfur to start the process of recovery. When we celebrate life, we support peace. ■



A painting created by the artist, Yehia Adam Mohammed. Yehia speaks on the role of local artists in bringing about peace and social cohesion in Darfur. Photo by Saeed Salim, UNAMID.



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