

UNAMID's publication for the people of Darfur

VOICES

of Darfur

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RAMADAN

A TIME OF SPIRITUALITY
& GRATITUDE

DARFUR'S GREEK CHURCH

SERVING THOSE IN NEED

LIVING ON THE EDGE

MAINTAINING PEACE IN KUTUM



AFRICAN UNION - UNITED NATIONS
MISSION IN DARFUR
(UNAMID)

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01 UNAMID Deputy Joint Special Representative Moham-ed B. Yonis travels to South Darfur to meet with the State's Wali (Governor), Dr. Abdul Hammid Musa Kasha, and leaders of Kalma internally displaced persons camp to address the security situation in the camp.



12 Thousands gather at El Zubeir Stadium in El Fasher, North Darfur, to see internationally-renowned musicians perform at a UNAMID-sponsored concert marking the beginning of the International Year of Youth, under the theme "Together as one."



18 Two Jordanian UNAMID police advisers abducted by unidentified armed men on 14 August in Nyala, South Darfur, are released unharmed.



21 Mr. James Oppong-Boanuh of Ghana takes up his duties as UNAMID's Police Commissioner. Mr. Oppong-Boanuh succeeds Mr. Micheal Fryer of South Africa.

AUGUST AT A GLANCE



23 UNAMID Joint Special Representative (JSR) Ibrahim Gambari concludes a two-day visit to El Geneina and Zalingei, West Darfur where he is briefed on the security and humanitarian situation. During the visit, the JSR meets with leaders of the Mournei internally displaced persons camp located about 48 kilometers south of El Geneina.



26 AU High Level Implementation Panel Chairman Thabo Mbeki, US Special Envoy for Sudan Scott Gration, Sudanese Presidential Advisor Ghazi Salahuddin Atabani and UNAMID JSR Ibrahim Gambari take part in discussions on the Darfur peace strategy.

The meeting underlines the necessity of a comprehensive strategy that encompasses all aspects of the Darfur problem, including security, stabilization, development and early recovery.



Ramadan in Darfur

A time when fasting, spirituality, noble values and generosity come together.

BY GUIOMAR PAU

Ramadan is the month of fasting and worshipping. Along with prayer, Muslims fast during the day for a whole month. When night falls, activity revitalizes and 'Iftar' (after sunset meals) or 'Suhoor' (before the dawn) substitute the usual dinner and breakfast.

Besides the traditional meals, the holy month brings with it goodwill and humbleness, along with acts of charity. Due to the fact that fasting Muslims will not eat or drink during daylight hours, they need to have energizing and nutritious meals dur-

ing the night to carry them through the day.

Some women are confronted with a major challenge during Ramadan as they will work throughout the day and then prepare large, varied dishes for the entire family, while fasting. For those living in internally displaced person (IDP) camps the sacrifice can be even greater.

In Abu Shouk IDP camp, near El Fasher, North Darfur, women prepare large meals in spite of having to utilize the normal rations they

receive from the World Food Programme: sorghum, sugar, beans, salt, and oil.

"I have to work for three days to earn 18 pounds (US \$7) to buy a kilo of meat. Meat is very expensive here, I cannot afford it," explains Asina Abdallah Raman, who arrived in the camp in 2004. She used to have a farm in her village of Takpar, located close to Korma, 81 kilometers west of El Fasher. "There is a big difference in the way we celebrate Ramadan now compared to how we did before, when we did not have eco-



PHOTOS : ALBERT GONZALEZ FARRAN

left. IDPs from Abu Shouk prepare the evening meal

right top. A woman in Abu Shouk carries the Iftar

right down. Abdul Baki smokes after sunset in Turba Village

conomic problems," she recalls. She is currently the only member of her family who has a job and when she finishes her duties she still has to prepare special dishes and drinks for Ramadan for her husband and their five children.

Another resident, Umdifan Adam Ali, has been living in Abu Shouk for six years. She is unhappy as it is still not safe to return to her home in Korma. "There are fights there and the armed men have stolen our livestock," she explains. During Ramadan she feels exhausted; she

has many tasks and preparing the 'Iftar' takes a long time. Starting with soaking dates at 14:00 hrs, she and her eldest daughter cook during the afternoon until they finish with 'asida,' a traditional dish made with flour and water. The meal will take several hours to prepare.

When the sun sets, men in Abu Shouk, as well as in El Fasher, join other male family members and neighbors to break the fast and pray together outside, while women remain at home. It is an old tradition which started when nomadic peo-

ple began to live in Darfur, and its inhabitants gave food to people who were passing by their town during the days of Ramadan. The tradition remains upheld as men still invite those who might pass through to share a meal.

For many this is a special time of the year as fasting, spirituality, noble values and generosity come together.



Darfur's Greek Church

In a region with a predominately Muslim population, a minority of less than 5,000 Catholics have their own place of worship. The church also runs a medical center and a kindergarten.

BY ALA MAHHAYI AND SHARON LUKUNKA

It is well known that the ancient Greek civilization was widely spread and many of their traces still exist in different countries all over the world. Yet, not a lot of people know that the Greeks reached even the lands of Darfur.

During the 18th Century, Greek and Syrian merchants arrived in El Fasher, North Darfur, as traders selling goods such as clothes and food items. In modern times, the Greeks would have a place in El Fasher which remains open to this day. It is the Catholic Church, built in 1938, and called "Our Lady Help of Christians Parish."

Since opening its doors, the church has been actively attended by Christians, a minority of less than 5,000 people. Today the place of worship hosts nearly 300 attendees every Sunday, most of whom are originally from the Nuba Mountains of South Kordofan, in addition to internationals from United Nations organizations and NGOs. Mass services in Arabic are performed for national worshippers, while services for expatriates are held in English.

The church provides many services to the population regardless of their religion. For example, it runs a medical center which lends free assistance to those who need it. Medicines are provided by Sudan Aid, a small humanitarian organization

belonging to the church. The parish also has a kindergarten for the children of El Fasher, which supplies educational materials and provides entertainment activities. Since the outbreak of the armed conflict in Darfur, the church's doors have been open for those affected, Christians and Muslims alike, and for internally displaced persons in need of shelter or humanitarian aid.

The El Fasher Catholic Church belongs to the El Obeid Diocese, whose bishop is presently Antonio Menegasso. The Church has two priests, Reverend Father Lucka Jomo and Reverend Anthony Ernest Laa - both are from South Sudan.

The church runs Christian Centers in other places, one of which is in Zam Zam for UNAMID staff, and another in El Geneina.



A young worshipper with the picture of St. Bakhita

Among the many pictures of saints hanging on the church's walls is that of Josephine Bakhita, the first Sudanese saint. Kidnapped at an early age by merchants, she was sold into slavery numerous times before being purchased by an Italian diplomat and taken to Italy. It was there that she spent more than 50 years, before passing away in 1947. Recognizing her as an African saint who overcame great hardship, Josephine Bakhita was canonized on 1 October 2000.

Father Lucka has seen many changes during his six years with the parish. "The security situation has improved. People now walk freely in the streets, and we see new buildings coming up, new schools and roads, despite an increase in local prices. However, the international community has stimulated the local economy and provided job opportunities to the Darfuris," he said. Father Luka noted that the church maintains a good

relationship with national authorities.

The church is part of Darfur's history and a symbol of the region's cultural heritage. In these critical times, serving those in need regardless of religion or origin, the church proves that people of Darfur can unite to overcome their differences.





King Rahemtallah Mahmoud showing old photos

PHOTO: ALBERT GONZALEZ FARRAN

The King of El Fasher

Over 60 years of peacekeeping

BY MAYADA UMBADDA

King Rahemtallah Mahmoud of El Fasher is a weathered and steadfast pillar of his North Darfur community who can remember a time when electricity, telephone lines and the British Army's short pants were new in Darfur. But ask how old he is and he'll just laugh and say, "There are three numbers you don't tell anyone: your salary, your money and your age."

This engaging raconteur has a story for nearly every street and building in town, having seen most of them built around him. Nonetheless, King Rahemtallah remains close-lipped about his age, adhering to the centuries-old belief that it is best not

to boast about your good fortune, lest it be quickly taken away. He may sometimes offer a hint of a memory from the early years of Anglo-Egyptian condominium rule, which lasted from 1899 to 1955, before laughingly insisting that he is "only 40 years old. You add the rest as you see fit."

"I don't know how old he is," says his deputy and 68-year-old nephew, Mr. Ibrahim al-Zibeir, "But may God lengthen his years."

During his long life, he has worn a bafflingly diverse array of hats. As King of El Fasher, he has chaired the rulings of the El Fasher Central

Civil Court for 67 years, mediating domestic and inheritance cases, debt settlements and land disputes as complex as any TV courtroom drama. He also served two terms in parliament and was twice awarded the National Livery of Honor. Since 2009, as a civil society leader in the troubled region, he has twice travelled to Doha to take part in the ongoing peace talks.

In Darfur, a king presides over a people or region, overseeing the hierarchy of tribal leaders, which include *sharati* (singular: *shartai*), *omdas* and *sheikhs*. In other parts, a king can also be called the *Magdoun* or the "Sheikh of sheikhs". Whether

settling minor squabbles between neighbors or drawing up payment plans for farmers deep in debt, generations of these tribal elders are relied upon by their communities for an impartial ear and the patience to mediate solutions to the satisfaction of all parties.

While formal courts still have the final say if these civil disputes go to trial, most people still prefer to first take their cases to these traditional courts. "In close communities, if a case goes so far as to be tried in state court, it sometimes leaves bitterness in the heart," explains Mr. al-Zibeir. "But when both sides reach a compromise through mediation, the ruling is more readily accepted and it is easier to reconcile and swallow than anger."

In the early 1900s, these tribal leaders acted as advisers to Sultan Ali Dinar, who ruled Darfur from 1898 to 1916. Among them was Rahemtallah Mahmoud's father, King Mahmoud, originally from Goz Beina, several kilometres south of El Fasher, who was called upon to assume responsibility for El Fasher and the surrounding area. The Sultan died in 1916 and Darfur was made part of the Sudan.

A well-travelled life

Like most children in North Sudan, King Rahemtallah's formal education began at a *khalwa*, or religious school, where he had to memorize large portions of the Quran. Children of all ages sat in a circle in the sand, writing verses on wooden boards over and over, reciting them in a low, melodious hum.

He later enrolled at the El Fasher School for Boys, built in 1916. "It was a very good school," he recalls. "It was all funded by the government. But back then, many people weren't willing to enroll their children in ur-

ban schools because they felt that it would distance them from their religion."

After graduating, Rahemtallah Mahmoud went on to the renowned Bakht al-Ruda Teaching Training Institute in the White Nile state. "It was a melting pot. Students came from all over the country," he recalls. "We lived together in the dormitories. Everything was provided for; parents didn't pay a thing."

He returned with his teaching degree to Goz Beina where he became a part of the native administration, as a *shartai*. There, he quickly gained a reputation as a fair and straightforward arbitrator. During this time, his older brother, Mohammed Mahmoud, was king in El Fasher.

In 1943, Rahemtallah Mahmoud was called to El Fasher to act as deputy to his brother, while the king made the pilgrimage to Mecca, a duty which all able Muslims must perform at least once in their lifetimes. However, King Mohammed Mahmoud died during the arduous journey, and Rahemtallah Mahmoud solemnly assumed his responsibilities.

In the years to come, King Rahemtallah's active role in his community saw him become a member of the State Legislative Assembly. Then in 1953, he was elected a member of the Sudan's first parliament, witnessing the declaration of the nation's independence in 1956. He was awarded the National Livery of Honor in 1975, and again in 1982, and also received three national medals of merit and service.

His many initiatives have taken him to many countries. Over the years, the King has visited most of the Middle East and has even made his way to France and America. "I lived in Alabama for a year, where two of

my five sons live and work," he says. He is even a member of the Rotary club, whose headquarters are in Evanston, Illinois, in the United States.

These days, he is even busier. Each day begins at dawn, when he makes his way to the mosque next door to perform his morning prayers. His time is split between the courthouse and the activities of the civil society, where, as a leading member, King Rahemtallah works to help return peace to his beloved land by helping to bring people together through dialogue.

"A lot of young lives have been lost. My prayers this Ramadan were that God deliver us from the misfortunes that have befallen us," he says. "That reconciliation can take place and that the land may flourish once more. We have to find common ground."

That prayer echoes most constantly in his neighborhood in the Feizan district of El Fasher, where the King's house has long stood between the town's Greek Orthodox church and the mosque of King Idris al-Sanousi, the latter built in the 1800s. "We all have a very good relationship here. We go to each other's events. We learn about each other."

A teacher at heart, King Rahemtallah constantly stresses the importance of education. "It is what lifts the people, and the country," he insists. Then he smiles and adds ruefully, "But young people are preoccupied with their youth. They only make time to play."

As for whether he will ever have free time, the answer comes quickly and firmly. "We have no retirement. We love this land and there is nothing more important than serving it."

Job promotion for college graduates in Darfur

Despite an expanding economy, many remain unemployed.

BY JUSTIN THUNDU, MUBARAK BAKO AND MUTAZ FREIHA

Darfur's economy is largely characterized by the trade of livestock and agriculture products with Libya, Chad and the Central African Republic. However, recently the economy has included expansion into a variety of other sources of income.

In downtown El Fasher, North Darfur, new businesses, such as service companies, handcraft workshops, gas stations, training centers, grocery stores, and even a few restaurants offering international cuisine have sprung up. Alongside business development, job opportunities have increased in the city. The presence of international organizations has been among the contributing factors to the creation of new job opportunities.

However, in spite of this growth, many recent graduates remain unemployed.

Approximately 1,200 students graduate from the University of El Fasher each year. According to a recent survey conducted by Voices of Darfur, covering Nyala, South Darfur, El Geneina, West Darfur and El Fasher, and including several internally displaced person camps, as many as 75 per cent of graduates are unemployed. Some search for a job for many years without luck. Others, out of despair, end up taking low paying positions.

The causes of unemployment in the state are disputed, however the conflict has inevitably been a factor.

Atta'yib Idriss has been looking for a job for two years. He has a diploma

in Accounting and Social Development Studies.

We spoke with Mr. Idriss.

What do you think are the reasons behind this failure?

The major reason is the lack of jobs in the state. Which leaves many graduates unemployed.

What are you doing to make ends meet?

I began to sell envelopes and prepare files for job seekers whenever



Atta'yib Idriss



Rabab Isshag Ahmed

there are vacancies posted at international organizations in Nyala.

As you have been unable to find work, what effect has this had on you and your family?

The matter is of grave concern. It has a severe effect on one's psyche. One becomes a bystander and a burden on the family instead of a catalyst for change. This makes my life difficult. In general, it is a very painful situation.

Rabab Isshag Ahmed received a Diploma in Translation from Khartoum Applied College in 1997. In spite of the responsibilities towards her large family, she managed to earn a Master's degree in Gender and De-

velopment from El Ahfaad University in Omdurman, Sudan, in 2005.

To meet the needs of her family, she first resorted to minor jobs at small enterprises. Ms. Isshag then managed to find temporary work with an INGO. However, now she is again unemployed.

Ms. Isshag expressed sorrow and regret about the situation of the youth in Darfur. She considers herself lucky amongst her friends, because she has qualifications with which she can compete when a job opportunity arises.

But, is it only a matter of luck to find a good job?

Mohamed Ibrahim, 26, acquired a degree in engineering from Zalingei University in West Darfur. Upon completion, he went back to his hometown of

Nyala for job prospects, but employers could not offer him any job as he was over-qualified.

He returned to El Geneina and started a small business. He became an irrigation farmer, producing vegetables and fruits. Today, Mohamed is a successful farmer who has secured contracts with government institutions.

Mr. Ibrahim's success should serve as an inspiration to others. And, as Ms. Isshag says: "Hope is always there and young people should never give up."

Volunteering for peace

"I can learn from them and they can learn from me."

BY GUIOMAR PAU

Among military, police, international and national staff, around 470 United Nations volunteers (UNV) work in UNAMID for the pleasure of contributing to peace in Darfur. They do not earn a salary, only an allowance to cover their living expenses. But that is not an impediment when it comes to attracting qualified, motivated professionals to the mission.

After a long career in humanitarian international organizations in African and Asian countries, Cosmos Joel Lumana, from Uganda, decided to join UNAMID as a volunteer. He was not afraid of coming to Darfur, where he had been before, in 2005, working for Oxfam. He saw the needs of the region and was certain that he could use his skills to make a difference.

He began his service as a supply officer with UNAMID in November 2007, following 18 years of working in Logistics and Operations for organizations including World Vision International, Food for the Hungry International, Christian Mission Aid and Right to Play.

Cosmos is enthusiastic about his job as a volunteer because he sees it as a great challenge. "Volunteers in UNAMID are taking leading positions in all sections and units. Despite the many challenges, they serve as role models in the mission, working long hours in a hard environment, without regard to financial benefit," he affirms.

He notes that volunteers in UNAMID are highly skilled, appreciated by



Cosmos Lumana at work

section chiefs, and are team players. Many of them play key leadership and management roles. "I'm proud to be one of them, as all UNVs should be, because they are leaders," he remarks.

After almost two years as a volunteer, what he most enjoys is the multi-cultural composition of the Mission. He has met people who come from around the world, affording him the opportunity to learn about different cultures.

Passionate about learning new customs, Cosmos is fascinated by Sudanese tradition. He considers himself lucky because he speaks Arabic and can interact with the local community: "I can learn from them and they can learn from me."

From his experience in Darfur, he sees that UNAMID has worked hard for peace in many areas of the region in collaboration with all partners, providing protection and security to internally displaced persons and facilitating humanitarian access to the needy.

He does not know yet how long he will remain in Darfur, but he does know that he enjoys being a UNV and considers Darfur his temporary home. Cosmos, as with many volunteers, is a real peace worker who has only one goal in mind: making a difference to the people of Darfur.



DARFUR CELEBRATES YOUTH

PHOTOS : OLIVIER CHASSOT



Nancy Ajaj





To mark the International Year of Youth, UNAMID organized a series of celebrations for young people throughout Darfur. Among the many events, under the theme "Together as One," a concert was held in El Fasher, North Darfur, on 12 August featuring the music of internationally renowned Sudanese recording artists Omar Ihsas and Nancy Ajaj.

Omar Ihsas



Living on the edge

Since May 2010, almost 700 South African soldiers have been based in North Darfur. Having to live and work in often difficult conditions, they work to provide protection within the region and in support of the peace process.

BY ALBERT GONZALEZ FARRAN

A South African peacekeeper in an APC near Kutum.

PHOTOS : ALBERT GONZALEZ FARRAN



An African peacekeeper driving an APC in Kambut village

Lieutenant Justin Heath, on duty in Fata Burno

Lieutenant W.N. Nkosi awakes at five o'clock in the morning, outside it's dark. Still sleepy, but ready for another day, she has a bowl of cereal and then a cold shower. Nkosi, from Johannesburg, is one of around 700 South African peacekeepers posted in North Darfur since May 2010. Most are based in Kutum, but there are more than 200 stationed in Melit and Malha (also in North Darfur).

Working towards the fulfillment of peace in Sudan is hard work, "but at the end of the day we realize that this experience is also good for our lives," she states. "Sand storms [*"haboobs"* in the local language], torrential rains, a lack of water, food poisoning... Nothing is easy in this mission."

For seven months they train, work long shifts and patrol to keep the local people safe. Working in the peacekeeping mission in the Sudan means some sacrifices for the soldiers. Far from their families and friends, they may place only one five-minute call per month from the mission official landline, although most of them will spend money using their personal cell phones on a daily basis. The Internet is slow and also restricted due to the fact that the soldiers are only allowed to log in for 30 minutes a day.

Compound tap water is limited to two hours per day and food is not abundant. They wash their own clothes and clean the tents where

they sleep (12 soldiers per tent). In the base, there is little entertainment, so they have to look for extracurricula activities for the long hours when there is very little to do (such as reading, watching movies, playing videogames, chatting, organizing football and volleyball tournaments). A peacekeeping mission is not a holiday, but the soldiers try to find ways to de-stress.

"We are here to represent our country", advises Nkosi. South Africa currently has 4,500 soldiers deployed throughout the continent. In addition to the 700 soldiers in Darfur, the Democratic Republic of Congo and the Central African Republic are amongst those Missions benefiting from South Africa's contribution.

Lieutenant Justin Heath, now a Deputy Commander in Kutum, spent six months in the Congo. Justin, who is from Boksburg, is looking forward to the birth of a child due during October, but he will not be there. "This is the life of soldiers", admits Lieutenant Heath, whose wife is also in the military.

All members of the South African contingent are actually here voluntarily. But their volunteerism does not mean that they work without pressure. "We have to always keep our eyes open, because the situation in this area is unpredictable," advises Lieutenant Heath.

Kutum, during the rainy season, is

a complicated place to stay. Soldier Salomon Teke knows this perfectly well. He is 26 years old, born in Rustenburg, and is a seasoned peacekeeper who has served in the Congo in 2006 and Burundi in 2008. This background has made him stronger and he now feels ready for any adventure. In August, he spent the entire month guarding the water point in Kutum with nine of his colleagues. In this position, one kilometre from the camp site, life is hard. Beside a river, the small compound is often flooded and so they have grown accustomed to being surrounded by mud. "This is nothing," grins Salomon Teke, "last week we spent four days without water and food because our car got stuck in Ana Begi, in the middle of nowhere!"

Like the South African contingent, almost 16,000 soldiers have been similarly deployed from 40 other countries, forming the Mission's military contingent. With a combined total of 22,000 police and military personnel, UNAMID is the largest peacekeeping mission in existence worldwide. Currently, the Mission has 35 base camps established throughout Darfur, a region roughly the size of France.

All peacekeepers have their own story. Everyone has their own concerns and dreams, their nightmares and their difficulties working and living in the field. But all have the same aim: peace in Darfur. ■



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