

VOICES

of
Darfur

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THE HABOUB CHASE
UNAMID'S LONGEST PATROL

TRIUMPH OF A DREAMER
FEMALE PHYSICIST
TURNED ENTREPRENEUR

ALI DINAR'S PALACE
EL FASHER'S MUSEUM



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VOICES of Darfur ICES

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JULY AT A GLANCE

01 In marking six months in Darfur since assuming his post, UNAMID Joint Special Representative, Ibrahim Gambari, holds his first official press conference in Khartoum where he outlines UNAMID's activities and achievements during the period under review and the priorities and future plans of the Mission for peace and stability in the region.



04 More than 800 former combatants take part in a three-week voluntary disarmament exercise that begins in El Geneina, West Darfur. The exercise involves those from the parties to the conflict and is the third of its kind to be held in the region over the past year. While the event is part of the Government's disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) programme, UNAMID assists by providing logistical support, including security, transport, HIV/AIDS counseling and health screening.

08 UNAMID joins the world's first celebration of Nelson Mandela Day. "If you want to make peace with your enemy, you have to work with your enemy," is the main message of events held throughout Darfur.

27 A Russian helicopter pilot working under contract to the Mission is reported missing after his aircraft lands in an undesignated area on 26 July and is met by unknown gunmen. The missing crew member is later found and returned to UNAMID's base in Nyala, South Darfur, on 29 July.

30 Thousands of Internally Displaced Persons gather around UNAMID's Community Policing Centre (CPC) outside Kalma IDP Camp in South Darfur, following violent confrontations over IDP participation in the Doha peace negotiations on 29 July.

30 The UN Security Council passes resolution 1935 (2010), extending UNAMID's mandate for another year, until July 2011. The passage comes three days after JSR Gambari's address to the body.

Life journey through hope and art

Darfuri artist Hassan Ahmed, who once worked as a caricaturist in a national newspaper, depicts his people's struggle in his paintings

Hassan Ahmed's first drawings were a child's scrawls on the walls of his home in Nyala, South Darfur, a hobby that was the source of much annoyance to his parents. But they were gradually won over by their child's cheerful enthusiasm. His mother supplied him with crayons and paper and always encouraged him, but never dreamed that, 20 years later, he would win a thousand-Sudanese-pound prize (nearly 410 USD) in a caricature contest organized by an art magazine. That prize, even more than its monetary value, was the pride of Hassan and his family for many years.

As a young man in 1997, Hassan Ahmed traveled to Khartoum, where his entry in a contest run by the Sudanese newspaper 'The Political Caricature' won him the grand prize and a job as a caricaturist. Working in the Sudan's largest city gave him the opportunity to learn from some of the finest Sudanese artists and painters of the time, and also to sell his art at bazaars in Khartoum's top hotels.

In 2008, Hassan Ahmed returned to his hometown. Great pain filled his heart as he saw the devastation brought on by the war; the burned villages, the displacement to some of his family and relatives; and the passing of several of his childhood friends.

Finding a decent fixed job became an enormous challenge as conditions continued to deteriorate in the region, but for people like Hassan,

hope never dies. Currently, he works as a residential guard in a guesthouse in El Fasher, though he paints in his free time.

In a recent interview with *Voices of Darfur*, he shed a light on his artworks and his career as an artist.

Mr. Hassan, what aspects of Darfur do you like to show in your paintings?

"I show the struggle of the Darfuris



Hassan Ahmed's work

and how they persistently keep working in spite of the difficult situations. For example, the Darfuri woman takes from the nature to make something, whether from the trees or from mud so that life continues. They never give up. I address the human beings, the things they use from the nature around them and how they make use of these simple things to make something beautiful."

Have you held any exhibitions?

"Yes, I held my first one in the Libyan Culture Center in Khartoum. Later, I participated in a number of exhibitions in the French Center. The last one I had was in 2005 in Medani, which was then the cultural capital of the Sudan. That show, included various caricatures and other artworks and featured other artists such as Nader Jenny, Ghazy Al-Aqab and Abdul Muni'm Hamza."

Were these shows successful, in terms of attendance?

"Yes, they were well-attended. Unfortunately however, it was not to sell anything."

How do you find the general situation of artists now in Darfur?

"There are many fine artists in here, particularly in El Fasher and Nyala, but the environment they live in and other factors are not helping them to sell locally, except for some advertisement works."

How do you see yourself as an artist five years from now?

"I am optimistic/confident that I will continue drawing. Sometimes I give a painting as a gift and don't care about the price."

At the end of the interview Hassan Ahmed voiced his wish to have a small studio, where he can display his works. He expressed sadness that there was not a single art gallery in any of Darfur's three states, which he believes is crucial for providing artists with opportunities to connect with the people, and convey their messages of the triumph of hope and creativity over adversity.

Story: Ala Mayyahi

Photos: Albert Gonzalez Farran





Drums used to declare war

CULTURE

Ail Dinar's palace: El Fasher's museum

The museum provides a glimpse into the Nubian civilization and pays tribute to a famed Sultan.



Ali Dinar's Palace

In the heart of El Fasher, North Darfur, sits the Ali Dinar Museum. Once the property of the famed sultan, the museum displays artifacts of Darfur's ancient Nubian civilization, as well as pays tribute to a former leader, beloved by many for the battles he fought against foreign armies from far off lands.

Upon entering, visitors cannot help but notice the two large drums made of copper. The gentleman in charge of the museum taps on them as he proudly tells the guests that they were used to declare war or to announce a death sentence. At such an occasion, the Sultan would wear his red coat, now on display in near perfect condition inside glass case.



The Sultan's red coat

Ali Dinar ruled the region between the end of 19th and early 20th centuries. His palace was constructed between 1911 and 1912 under the direction of a Turkish engineer brought in from Baghdad and employing the skills of Greek carpenters and Egyptians builders.

The Sultan would die in 1916 in a fierce battle during the First World War and his palace would fall in to the hands of conquering forces. Following the Sudan's independence, the palace would serve a various purposes, including as a headquarters of the Darfur province and at other times as an Officer's Club. In 1977, Sudanese President Jaafar Nimeiri issued a decision to turn the Palace into a museum under the management of the Archeology Department. Since then, the property has been accessible to the public, and

receives national and international visitors.

The museum is divided in to two main collections. The Nubian civilization wing displays items and archaeologi-

Marawi civilization, while the Darfuri civilization wing exhibits the personal possessions of Ali Dinar, including his sword, gold and silver watches, lancers, and a colorful rug from Persia.



Nubian-era vessels

cal artifacts that belonged to different stages of the Nubian civilization existed in Sudan till the end of the

A large green garden with numerous old and stately trees sits to the left side of the museum, including one that is said to have been there since the reign of Sultan Ali Dinar.

The museum is among the most treasured attractions of El Fasher and is well maintained by the Ministry of Culture, Sport and Tourism in North Darfur.

**Story: Ala Mahhayi
Sharon Lukunka
Photos: Albert Gonzalez Farran**

Blessed with children after five years waiting

Adoption or a fertility test were never an option, because it's not the culture here. Luckily, Ali's patience paid off and his prayers were answered.

That children are a gift from God is a widely held belief. The lack of children among families in many parts of the world can have devastating consequences on a married couple. By contrast, some couples in other societies choose not to have children or turn to adoption. Here in the Sudan, children are an important element in cementing a marriage.

Ali Abdel Karim, 34 years of age, is a medical technician with UNAMID in El Fasher, north Darfur. He has waited five years to experience the joy being a father. He never thought of adoption or even taking a fertility test because it's not the culture here. Nor did he think of taking another wife. Luckily for Ali, his patience and belief in Allah (God) to answer his prayers for children paid off. He is now the father of triplets, two girls, Lama and Lujain, and a boy, Omar, with his 32 year old wife Sara Tijani, a medical doctor who works in El Fasher teaching hospital.

Voices of Darfur had the chance to interview Ali.

How does it feel to suddenly become a father three times over?

"During the first month of hearing the news that my wife would give birth triplets, I was afraid, but somehow I knew that God would take care of us. I can't find the words to express my happiness. I also saw people who were happier than myself and that made me even more joyful."

Did you have any history of twins or triplets in yours or your wife's family?

"We have twins in my family, but not triplets. So we have a history. My father is a twin, my brothers and my cousins too. But for triplets this is a first."

What were the challenges of having to wait five years?

"I believe if you are patient, good news will come. So, I was not worried, but sometimes I noticed that my colleagues and my relatives were worried about my childlessness. However, they were afraid to ask me. Perhaps this was because I did not want to speak on the issue. But I believed everything comes from God and I was ready to be patient even beyond the five years."

How did your wife handle the whole situation?

"Sometimes she failed to hold on because of her friends, her family and everything. She was always tense. We live in El Fasher, North Darfur, but when she visited her family in Khartoum they had many questions for her. They asked her why she didn't visit the doctor. They wanted answers. They asked her why she stayed for a long time without a baby and that created only added stress for her."

Coming from the medical profession did you and your wife find it easier to explain to the people



Lama, Omar and Lujain

Sometimes I noticed that my colleagues and my relatives were worried about my childlessness.

who asked you about the delay in having children?

"Those close to us knew what the problem was because my wife had had two to three miscarriages during the first month of pregnancy, before the triplets, and all our colleagues knew this. The doctors even advised us that if my wife falls pregnant she should take complete bed



rest because she has high risk pregnancies. In fact, we followed the doctor's instructions. Everything after that went smoothly."

What caused it to be a high risk pregnancy?

"For our case there was a disease in the first month which caused clots in the placenta preventing blood from flowing from the mother to the baby and this caused the miscarriages. After this was investigated and known, they gave her treatment and it was taken regularly, with close follow-up and counseling."

While in Darfur did you find enough specialists who could deal with the rising number of complications during pregnancy?

"We have, but mainly in Khartoum. And the doctors advised us to go to Egypt. Even here in Darfur we have good specialists, but a good specialist is not always enough. We need access to advanced laboratories and facilities. Advanced health care and advanced nursing care are not available in El Fasher. For instance my babies were put in incubators for two weeks after delivery in Khartoum. In El Fasher we don't have incubators for a premature newborn."

So how are you coping with parenthood?

"Well, I am using my own money, there is no support from anywhere and I do not expect. I believe God will help me with that. But really it is not easy. I hope the Government can help poorer people. It is not easy taking care of triplets. If you don't have money it becomes a problem, even for the baby formula/milk you need a lot of money."

Story & Photo : Stella Vuzo



The Club Manager, Mr. Osama Marouf Shaib

Football for Peace

Al Murada club bring together the youth of IDP camps through sport.



Some people believe that clubs are strictly places for cultural exchange, sports and social activities, but it is more than that for the Al Murada club. The club located in El Fasher, North Darfur, is famous throughout the area. Al Murada serves to promote peace by establishing ties among the people especially the youth living in the Internally Displaced People's (IDP) camps.

Al Murada hosts football matches and leagues established to promote peace among El Fasher's citizens.

The club recently organized a series of matches among youth in the three Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps surrounding the town: Abu Shouk, Al Salam and Zam Zam. The winning team was awarded a cash prize. "Some of the players from Abu Shouk were overjoyed they defeated their El Fasher town counterparts in several matches," recalls Mr. Osama Marouf Shaib, the club's manager.

Al Murada has 450 youth members, and 75 more volunteers. Mr. Shaib shared some of the club's history with Voices of Darfur. "Between 2003 and 2005, when the IDPs first came to El Fasher after the war, we met them in their new homes. We were among the first to go to the IDP camps, and we held several matches with the Abu Shouk IDPs."

"The last match we had with our colleagues was on 5th of May 2010. It

was a very cordial competition. We, the youth, have always had good relations with IDPs, as indicated by the many social and sportive events. We are even invited to marriage ceremonies, and visit them many times to discuss the promotion of peace", as Osama stated.

Mr. Osama also said that the Al Murada club's members visited Southern Sudan in the 1990s and they are planning more exchange visits in the future. "Sport is not hatred. Sport is not meant to hurt people. It is loved by all, young and old. Sport has no enemy."

Story : Stella Vuzo
photos: Albert Gonzalez Farran

The tree of multiplicity

The baobab, often referred to as the 'tree of life,' serves not only a plethora of uses, it's also the subject of folklore.

The baobab is among the largest trees in Africa, often rising 25-30 meters and with a trunk measuring as much as 10.5 meters in diameter.

Traditionally known by Africans as the 'tree of life,' the baobab provides shelter and food to many of the continent's inhabitants. In fact, every part of it serves a utilitarian purpose: the bark for cloth and rope; the leaves for food and medicine; and, the fruit eaten and especially enjoyed by children.

The species, which mainly grows in the southern, eastern and western countries of Africa, is also found in the Sudan, where it is known by the inhabitants as the 'Tabaldi' and its fruit called 'gongalis.' The Baobab's trunk is employed as a tank to store water, its bark cut into shingles for roofs or used in treating fever, its timbers turned into furniture, and its leaves used in salads or as feed for grazing animals.

In the Sudan, its fruit is used for juice, served particularly during festive events, and also has medicinal properties used for treating abdominal pains and diarrhea. Gongalis also contain an abundant source of vitamin C, calcium and anti-oxidants.



A baobab tree near Nyala

Legend has it that if one passes near the twins at night, they will hear the singing and dancing.

The baobab also brings with it a number of folktales represented in poetry, songs and art. In the Sudan, the locals believe that two baobabs aside one another, referred to as 'twins,' is an ominous sign representing a 'djinn' (demon in the Islamic tradition). Legend has it that if one passes near the twins at night, they

will hear the singing and dancing of this demon. It is also thought that two or more of the trees bring about a ghost, known as 'Abu Lamba' (meaning one with the lamp), who lives in the tree and misleads people at night, making them lose their way.

It is indeed the 'tree of life,' with its multipurpose role, the tree continues to serve the entire inhabitants of Africa including Darfur that come across it.

Story: Sharon Lukunka
Photo: Kone Mouroulaye



Triumph of a dreamer

Mona Solar Energy, run by physicist and social entrepreneur Mona Mohamed Gumma Khatier, produces fuel efficient stoves and distributes them to IDP families in Darfur.

Amidst insecurity and poverty, one woman is making a difference in the lives of the people of Darfur, particularly women; save their labor time, meager financial and natural resources, as well as reducing their risk of exposure to violence, especially that which is sexual and gender based.

Dr. Mona Mohamed Gumma Khatier, an educator by profession, a physicist by education and a social entrepreneur by passion, is working on a brilliant idea which has already benefited thousands of families in Darfur. She is providing local solutions to local problems giving thousands of Darfurians, trapped in a cycle of conflict, access to efficient methods of resource consumption.

What she does is not a part of a multi-million dollar venture or mega humanitarian program. No, it's just a simple fuel efficient stove made by her organization using local materials: iron rods, cement, cow dung, saw dust and special clay coming from an area called Kondowa, situated in the outskirts of Nyala, South Darfur. The labor and materials she uses to make such a stove cost her less than 8 dollars.

Her organization, Mona Solar Energy Organization, with the support of international organizations and various UN agencies has produced thousands of these fuel efficient stoves in the last four years and distributed among the IDP families across Darfur. Speaking about the efficiency of the unit, she notes that fuel consumption can be reduced up to 60 per cent in comparison to other traditional methods used for

cooking in Darfur.

Upon investigation, a woman from Al-Salam IDP camp, located South West of Nyala, affirmed that the use of a fuel efficient stove has actually saved her time by reducing the frequency of her firewood collection visits to the nearby forest. Now she goes out to collect firewood once a week, instead of what had been twice per week.

The use of a fuel efficient stove has actually saved her time by reducing the frequency of her firewood collection visits to the nearby forest.

The concept of fuel efficient stoves is not new in Darfur. In the past, many international NGOs and UN agencies supported similar initiatives. However, her organization is among a very few local organizations which are still producing and distributing the stoves in South Darfur.

Mona after completing a Masters degree in Physics from Sudan University, Khartoum, proceeded to Manchester University, UK, in pursuit of higher studies and earned a PhD in Solar Physics. Later, she went to Holland to study for a higher diploma in Energy Management. In a country where the female adult literacy rate stands at 51.8 per cent (Human Development Report 2009), Dr. Khatier has been among a very few fortunate women to attain this level of education in her discipline.

No doubt she is an icon of inspiration for young girls in Darfur. Only with sheer conviction and focus can one achieve such goals, no matter how difficult the circumstances.

Her organization also excels in the use of solar energy for producing electricity. As part of her private ventures, she has completed 12 solar energy projects in South Darfur and two in West Darfur for schools, universities and individual households. Speaking about the viability of use of solar energy for electrification in Darfur, she says, "although the projects we piloted in Darfur were cost effective, efficient and successful, my organization does not have enough resources to replicate similar projects in other areas. Probably with some help from the international community we can do so."

Dr. Mona has also been an active member of the Gender Equality Committee, established by UNAMID's Gender Advisory Unit. With her thorough knowledge and insight into the gender dynamics of the conflict and the issues of women in Darfur, she is playing a vital role in steering the work of the committee. Speaking on her future plans, she expresses her full commitment and devotion to support the women of Darfur.

Story & Photos : Saleemullah Baig



The Haboub Chase: UNAMID's longest patrol

Over the course of nine days, a patrol travels more than 1,000 km across Darfur.





left. Ethiopian's tactical helicopter joins the mission
above. Rwandan peacekeepers escort the patrol
right. Members of the Nepalese Special Forces push a broken truck

In the increasingly changeable and unpredictable security environment of Darfur, with its mounting humanitarian challenges, UNAMID conducted a 9-day, 1077 Km, multi-agency Extended Long Range Patrol (ELRP) between 19-27 June 2010 around parts of North and West Darfur to provide the critical and often elusive access to various agencies in pursuance of their requirements to support peace in Darfur. The operation, codenamed 'Exercise Haboub Chase,' was the longest patrol in UNAMID history. The previous 'longest road trip' travelled no more than 500 kilometers.

The first of its scale and scope, the exercise was ordered by UNAMID Force Commander Lt. Gen. Patrick Nyamvumba and was conceptualized, planned and conducted by the Nepalese Special Forces Company. Sixty eight members of the Nepalese Special Forces (there are 160 posted in El Fasher since last Janu-

ary as UNAMID's strategic reserve), led by Lt Col. Anup Jung Thapa, had the support of tactical helicopters, which over flew the convoy on the more dangerous parts of the route. "This trip will serve as a model for future exercises," said Colonel Thapa. The exercise included training on anti-ambush drills and combat life-saver medical techniques. Additionally, it tested radio communications en route and gained a better grasp of the humanitarian situation.

The patrol enhanced the troops' situational awareness and served to improve inter-agency cooperation and conduct training. It also assisted UNAMID in updating vital information while reassuring the local population and exhibiting its presence throughout the patrol route. The mission signifies the continuing enhancement of UNAMID's capabilities and targeted Darfuris, humanitarians and UNAMID as beneficiaries. The patrol passed through

territories held by different groups and passed through three dozen checkpoints of various factions.

The exercise was conducted jointly with peacekeeping forces from South Africa, Senegal, Ethiopia, Burkina Faso and Rwanda. The Ethiopian Tactical Helicopter Unit provided significant support to the exercise by flying 23 sorties.

This was the first time that a UNAMID Force Commander joined a long range road patrol. "I wanted to witness the operations and to give my personal support to the troops," commented Nyamvumba. At the conclusion of the mission, the Force Commander declared it a resounding success the results of which would be invaluable for future UNAMID operations.

**Story and Photos:
 Albert Gonzalez Farran**



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