



January 2010

United Nations Mission

In SUDAN

Marriage and cattle

Published by UNMIS Public Information Office



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FRONT COVER: Dinka wedding in Abyei.
Photo: UNMIS/Tim McKulka

BACK COVER: Bride and flowergirl showing
henna painting at Khartoum beauty salon.
Photo: UNMIS/Eszter Farkas

Diary

13 December: The two civilian staff members of the joint African Union-United Nations peacekeeping mission in Darfur (UNAMID) who were abducted at gunpoint in the town of Zalingei on 29 August were released after more than 100 days in captivity, following a call from Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon to President Omar Al-Bashir on 7 December 2009 to facilitate their release.

14 December: The Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General (SRSG) Ashraf Qazi welcomed the peaceful conclusion of the registration process for the 2010 elections, which drew participation from about 75 per cent of all eligible voters. To ensure the integrity of the process, Mr. Qazi also urged the more than 15 million Sudanese citizens who registered to confirm their names on the preliminary list of voters during the "Exhibition and Objection" period.

16 December: The World Food Programme and other UN agencies launched a pilot project to supply improved, fuel-efficient mud stoves to about 150,000 women in Sudan and Uganda. The stoves are intended to protect the environment and reduce the risks of violence facing recipients when they are gathering firewood.

21 December: Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said the Darfur peace process had reached a "critical point" and called on both the Sudanese Government and rebel groups to accelerate efforts towards reaching an agreement. Civil society groups and armed movements agreed to resume consultations on 18 January. They will be followed by direct talks between the Sudanese Government and rebel movements on 24 January that will be chaired by UNAMID Mediator Djibril Bassolé in the Qatari capital of Doha.

24 December: Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon appointed Lt. Gen. (retired) Jasbir Singh Lidder of India as his Deputy Special Representative for Sudan, and Georg Charpentier of Finland as his Deputy Special Representative and UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator in Sudan. Mr. Lidder has a distinguished career in the Indian armed forces and served as UNMIS Force Commander for over two years. Mr. Charpentier has extensive humanitarian and development work experience and served with the United Nations in Burkina Faso, Burundi, Ethiopia and Côte d'Ivoire, among other countries. He replaces Ameerah Haq, who was appointed Special Representative for Timor-Leste.

24 December: UNAMID and UNICEF provided logistics and security support and equipment to the Sudanese Government for its annual National School Competition in El Fasher, Darfur which began on 31 December 2009. The two-week-long intellectual and athletic contest brings together over 7,000 secondary school students from the country's 25 states.

29 December: UNAMID and the Sudanese Government signed an agreement to improve safety conditions for peacekeepers after a surge in attacks against the mission's uniformed military personnel. Five Rwandan peacekeepers were shot dead in early December, bringing to 22 the total number of UN staff who have died in Darfur.

29 December: The United Nations provided support to historic talks between warring Misseriya and Dinka Ngok tribes seeking to preserve a fragile peace in the disputed oil-rich area of Abyei. It was the first such meeting of the tribes since the Permanent Court of Arbitration handed down its ruling on Abyei's contested borders in July 2009.

30 December: Amid heated debate, the Sudanese National Assembly approved the Abyei Referendum and Popular Consultations Acts days after it had passed the National Security and Southern Sudan Referendum Acts on 20 and 29 December 2009. The legislation now awaits signature by President Al-Bashir.

1 January: SRSG Ashraf Qazi urged all Sudanese people to work together towards a more peaceful 2010, the last full year of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA). Key milestones in the coming months include national elections scheduled for next April, and a January 2011 referendum that could result in the secession of the country's 10 southern states. Mr. Qazi noted that "The political leadership will have a special and historical responsibility towards the Sudanese people ... for coming generations."

5 January: President Al-Bashir issued a decree relieving Arop Moyak from the position of the Head of the Abyei Area Administration and appointing Deng Arop Kual as his replacement.

Henna, skin and scent

Her skin decorated with circular patterns of henna, May Elzein was anxiously waiting for a facial mask to dry at a Bahri beauty studio, north Khartoum, on her wedding day.

The home-made mask of custard powder and water was intended to relax her skin before the make-up artist set to work on her face and hair, which would be the finishing touches of her wedding preparations.

"If they ask me, I could do it in one day!" Miraya FM radio journalist Ms. Elzein said with a tired laugh, referring to the time and energy consuming wedding process, which could last two to three months.

Wedding preparations in many areas of North Sudan began with families of the bride and groom agreeing on the wedding day, the date traditionally suggested by the groom's side, said Niveen Elmagboul, a lecturer at Ahfad University for Women.

The venue, in turn, was usually decided by the bride's family, who increasingly opted for large halls. This could be the Diplomatic Club in Khartoum, or the Rivera in Omdurman, while the event previously took place in the house of the bride's family.

A wedding gift called *sheila* was then presented by the groom to the bride, which might include clothes, *thobs* (full-body traditional dress), traditional perfumes, and even food items like flour, sugar and tea, Ms. Elmagboul said.

The *sheila* also contained a gift of money, called *mahar*, resembling the Southern Sudanese tradition of offering a previously negotiated number of cattle as bride price. But instead of bargaining, it "depends on the groom's economic status",

she added, generally starting at the sum of 1,000 Sudanese pounds (\$447).

One of the most difficult tasks was picking out items for the *sheila*, Einas Ali Osman said at the salon, while her friend Ms. Elzein was looking through sample wedding photos to choose her make-up.

Also labour-intensive was preparing for the bridal dance, although this was decreasing in popularity. It entailed hiring a teacher at great cost and practicing industriously for the performance, which took place after the wedding in front of the groom and an all-female audience.

Another arduous practice was the *dokhan*, or regularly sitting in the smoke of a sandalwood tree over a period of up to two months to smoothen the skin, give it a pleasing scent and make it absorb traditional perfumes more deeply.

The *dokhan* involved digging a one-metre-deep hole in the ground at the bride's compound, putting sandalwood in it and setting it on fire, Ms. Elmagboul explained.

The bride sat naked above the arising smoke, covering herself with a large blanket. She sat initially for half an hour, then extended this to two hours or more, and finally would cloud herself in smoke three times a day.

After the smoke formed a layer on her skin, a traditional scrub was repeatedly used "to give the bride a nice colour", the university lecturer said. Called *dilka*, the scrub was a mixture of *assida* (Sudanese porridge) cooked and smoked until black, orange powder, rice, and sometimes honey and



Henna drawings on bride's hand. Photo: UNMIS archive.

milk.

In addition, ladies in the capital used special lotions to achieve a whiter skin tone. "The fairer the skin and the softer the hair, the more beautiful one is considered," said Nada, sitting in a popular beauty salon in Khartoum's Riyad area, having her hair done for the big event.

After the skin was properly scrubbed and all body hair was removed with a solidified mixture of sugar and water, elaborate patterns of henna were painted on the arms and legs. Bridal henna was more extensive than the everyday version, sometimes reaching knee-height.

The groom had henna painted onto his palm during the wedding week and threw a party a day before the event. The bride's family provided *fatur el-aris*, "breakfast for the groom", consisting of falafel, *ful*, meat, fish, cheese, cookies and even perfumes or gifts for his parents.

As preparations were occurring, the marriage contract was also signed by representatives of the couple a day before or on the wedding day. "Men of both families have to be there ... the *Ma'zoon* (marriage official) asks them if they agree to the marriage, and they sign with two witnesses," Ms. Elmagboul said.

The lecturer thought today's practices were only different from a few generations back in quantity. "In the past they used to bring only four items for *sheila*, and the *mahar* also became bigger," she said, adding also that the bridal dance used to be more important.

In the past, she added, the bridal dance had been the first opportunity for the groom's wider family to view the bride up close, whereas today it was usual for them to meet before the wedding. ■



Henna paint on bride's legs. Photo: UNMIS/Eszter Farkas



Incense and other gifts presented to bride. Photo: UNMIS archive.

Eszter Farkas

Planting pumpkins

Courtship among the Kukus of Southern Sudan could begin with a boy hailing a girl from a distance in the village and asking her about local tobacco.

"Why do you ask for tobacco on the street? Come to visit our family," the girl might reply.

So starts the mating ritual, according to Jacob Gonda Woli, a member of the Kuku tribe, which is indigenous to the Kajo Keji area of Central Equatoria State.

The boy begins the courtship and the girl is expected to hide her feelings when they meet, which must occur in daylight hours, said Mr. Woli. "The Kuku culture prohibits girls from moving about with boys at night. However, girls can be found by daytime grinding grains and fetching water."

Once contact has been established, the boy asks some of his friends to visit the girl's home with him, so they can judge her worth. After their third visit, the prospective groom informs both sets of parents about the courtship.

The girl's parents then invite the friends to speak about the clan, tribe and culture of the boy. At the same time, the boy's parents dig into the girl's background, seeking evidence of laziness, witchcraft or riches.

If the boy's background passes the test, the girl's parents instruct the boy to "cut a tall bamboo", meaning call an elder. Elders from both sides then sit down to "plant pumpkins", or trace the backgrounds of the two families, with authority to approve or

Kuku tradition prohibits face-to-face meetings between prospective brides and grooms, but they can choose mediators to deliver messages or smooth over misunderstandings.

reject the courtship.

Once approved, the girl's family invites the boy's elders to make a payment – in local lingo "take a seat inside" and claim the girl – to depict the bride's family's acceptance of the marriage.

"From here on, the boy has totally claimed the girl and her fidelity is guaranteed, as the parents of the girl would drive away any boyfriends who attempted to perplex the lady," Mr. Gonda said.

Kuku tradition prohibits face-to-face meetings between prospective brides and grooms, but they can choose mediators to deliver messages or smooth over misunderstandings. The mediators also educate the couple in courtship and marital behaviour.

Michael Loja, another Kuku member, said mediators often organized surprise visits to the girl to assess her attitudes and emotional strengths or weaknesses.

"In some circumstances, the mediator from the boy's side would deliberately do something to vex the bride, and he would observe her reaction closely," said Mr. Loja.

After a customary two-year courtship, the couple and mediators agree on a date without needing to consult the parents.

Generally, the girl stops in at her

aunt's household on the day she gets married, Mr. Loja noted. The aunt explains how to behave with her future husband, including how to please him, control anger and deal with her new relatives.

After initial sexual contact between a man and his new wife, the mediators traditionally assessed whether the girl was a virgin, although the practice was uncommon today, said Mr. Loja. If she was not, the dowry was reduced by a cow or so.

About a month after the marriage, the boy's new in-laws, including youth, men, and women, visit his family armed with sticks, said Kuku member John Murye. The visitors beat whoever they find at home, but the bride and the bridegroom were expected to hide, he said.

"In Kuku culture, fighting during marriage is viewed as a display of might, and it determined how much negotiation capacity the elders from the bride's side had. It also showed how much the girl was loved back home," Mr. Murye said.

After the fighting, elders from both parties began negotiations for the dowry, which included goats, an average of six cows, iron ore (locally known as *lumongot*), hoes, spears and arrows, noted Mr. Murye.

Once the dowry payment was settled, the boy's family held a neighbourhood party, for which they brewed a local alcohol called *kwete*, he said. A traditional dance called *bula* (usually lasting three days) would take place, with people joining in to sing songs of both clans, many of which discouraged mistreatment of the girl or boy. ■

Text and photo: James Sokiri

Jacob Gonda and his wife at their residence near Juba.



Other tribes

As with the Kukus, the Baris require a dowry payment of about six cows to "close the door" on the girl, or drive away any man attempting to engage her, according to UNMIS Human Rights Assistant Sebur Ladu, a member of the Bari community.

Similarly, the Bari and Kuku have the same procedure for tracing family backgrounds, with elders assisting and approving or rejecting the courtship. Both traditions call off a marriage if there is no moon, which is viewed as a source of fortune.

Unlike the Kuku tradition, Kakwa girls marry after the dowry has been paid, said Kakwa member Emmanuel Taban George. But if the boy was unable to complete payment of the dowry before the marriage, he could pay in installments, noted another Kakwa, Nelson Khamis.

Louis Vitale, a Latuko, said his tribe carried out engagements in secrecy at markets, water points, dances or while collecting firewood. After a courtship of about a year, the boy would trap and carry the lady away by force, usually in the evening.

The couple would dance throughout the night at the boy's home. The next day, as the girl's parents attempted to trace her, the boy, girl and his parents would hide in the neighbourhood until the bride price was settled.

"After a full payment of the bride wealth, the boy and girl would go to the girl's family for a year or two to support the parents of the girl ... cultivate, build houses, graze animals. After that ... the boy would be required to go back to his father's home with his wife," Mr. Vitale said.

Marriage and cattle

A female member of the Dinka Bor tribe of Southern Sudan might be worth 30 or more cattle to a prospective suitor.

While some African communities have altered traditional marriage rites, the Dinka continue to collect a dowry or "bride price" for their daughters, according to Dinka Bor member Gabriel Kuot Alphaeus.

The courtship begins with a boy establishing a good relationship with a girl for some years, and then informing his parents he would like to marry her.

The boy's parents then checked the girl's family background before speaking with her parents, said Mr. Alphaeus. "This is done to ensure their son does not bring bad blood into the family line, such as witchcraft, cowardice and other social evils, which may be inherited by future offspring."

Cowardice was especially discouraged in a cattle-rearing people like the Dinka, who must occasionally defend their highly prized cows from rustlers, he added.

If the girl had two or more boyfriends, her parents would inspect each family's background, noted Dinka Bor member Deng Garang Akech. "The man with the most cattle and best family background would be the winner."

If a girl's parents rejected a desired union, the couple must abide by that decision or face the consequences, said Mr. Akech. "A friendship between a boy and a girl that is not accepted ... may lead to an excommunication of the couple by either family should they insist on going ahead with their marriage."

Once a proposal had been accepted, the boy's parents negotiated the dowry, which varied according to the future bride's

circumstances, said Mr. Alphaeus.

"It (the bride price) depends on ... other competitors, the size of the girl's family and the pride of the boy's (family) -- whether they release as many cattle as they (the bride's family) want," said Dinka Bor member Kuot Ajang Aguer.

After the dowry payment has been arranged, the girl is given to her husband designate in a ceremony organized by the two families.

Illegal and embarrassing

If marriage begins with elopement or pregnancy, considered illegal and embarrassing among the Dinka, other steps are followed to legalize the union. The situation must be carefully handled by the two families, especially the boy's, or conflict and violence could result.

Called "coming through a window", eloping or impregnating a girl required the boy's family to pay an expectant heifer (*akolchok*) each to the girl's father and mother and bulls (*adhiamhotkou*) to young men helping the father search for a daughter who had eloped, Mr. Aguer said.

Akolchok meant removing a thorn from the feet of the girls' father, explained Mr. Aguer. *Adhiamhotkou* referred either to young men laying down their fighting sticks, or covering the place in the girl's house she was removed from (generally her bed) during the elopement.

If a boy had eloped with the girl but denied impregnating her, he was fined five cows by the girls' parents, said Mr. Aguer. "But when he accepts responsibility for the

Divorce among cattle keeping tribes in Southern Sudan and neighbouring countries is uncommon.

pregnancy and his father is hesitant to pay the bride price, traditional law requests that he make available 30 heads of cattle ... (for) the family of the girl and his son receives the girl as his wife."

The normal procedure was then followed to formalize the marriage or *loluek*, which meant "entering the cattle shed", or taking cattle from the bridegroom to begin the dowry payment.

Divorce among cattle keeping tribes in Southern Sudan and neighbouring countries is uncommon, according to Mr. Aguer. If a Dinka Bor woman was divorced and returned to her parents after she had children, each child was worth five cows, which the man gave to the divorced girl's family.

The children remained with the husband and the father of the divorced woman returned the remaining cattle (of the dowry) to the boy's family. Thus, the relationship was terminated.

If the husband died, any surviving brother might inherit the widow to prevent her remarrying into a different family. ■

Felix Waya Leju



Women dancing at a wedding ceremony in Abyei. Photo: UNMIS/Tim McKulka

Children and power

Viewed as a means of achieving influence and power, the practice of taking more than one wife is widely accepted among most cultures in Southern Sudan.

"I cannot name tribes in Southern Sudan that do not practice polygamy, though some tribes like the Dinka, Nuer and Shilluk are known for practicing it more often," said Government of Southern Sudan Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports official Deng Nhial Chiok.

No cultural or legal edict banned having many wives, while the socio-cultural environment actually encouraged it, said Mr. Chiok, an anthropologist who serves as the ministry's senior inspector for folklore and festivals.

"The more wives you have, the more influential you become in the community," he said, noting that this meant an increased number of children and wider community ties, leading to more respect and power.

"Both men and women accept it," he noted. "A woman in a polygamous marriage sees herself as (more) privileged than her fellow woman in a monogamous one, because she believes her children will have many brothers and sisters."

While women accept the practice as a cultural tradition in Southern Sudan and most have no problems with it socially, they may feel differently emotionally.

"Every woman wants to possess her own man and we feel jealous sharing a husband," said Diana Danga Lubon, a registrar at the University of Juba's science college.

But Ms. Lubon observed that the practice was an economic boon, especially in rural areas where it served to increase the labour force, leading to more production.

University of Juba lecturer Florence Gasi Wani pointed to the social benefits of her polygamous marriage. "My co-wife helps a lot when I am sick in taking care of me, my husband and our children."

She added, however, that she had entered her polygamous marriage by choice, while family members arranged those of most women in rural areas.

More expensive

Although the practice may increase a family's labour force, Mr. Chiok noted that it became more expensive with each new

wife. Relatives and even friends pitched in to help pay the dowry of the first marriage, but the man paid for additional ones himself.

As cows paid dowries for tribes like the Dinka, Nuer and Shilluk, the bigger your herd the more wives you could have, said the ministry anthropologist, whose senior paper focused on marriage in the Nuer tribe. In his view, cattle were the main impetus behind the practice of polygamous marriage among these groups.

As they were able to pay the dowries, chiefs and renowned persons had more wives than ordinary citizens, he added.

"There are men who have as many as two hundred wives and they have important positions in the community."

But the man did not necessarily stay with all of his wives and impregnate them, he said, explaining how one found the time for so many women. "Such men may allow some of the wives to choose a man whom they want to impregnate them, but the children remain as children of the man who paid the cows."

Children born under these circumstances had a "social" and "biological" father, but the latter had no claims on them, Mr. Chiok said. If girls were among his children, he may receive part of any dowries paid – generally no more than two cows – as repayment for his part in their birth.

Despite its cultural acceptance, polygamy is becoming less prevalent in towns and cities for economic reasons, according to Ms. Lubon. "These days how can one afford to send children to school, buy clothing and feed them in the city?"

Mr. Chiok theorized that today's economic situation might lead to a drop in the number of polygamous marriages. "People will minimize practicing it when they realize they can no longer feed more family members." ■

Negus Hadera

Polygamy in North Sudan

Muslim men in North Sudan can have up to four wives provided that they treat them equally under the terms of the 1991 Muslim Personal Status Code. But the same institution that is tacitly accepted by Sudanese law is under fire from many women's groups.

President Omar Al-Bashir has strongly endorsed polygamous marriages as a culturally acceptable means for increasing the national population.

"The (Personal Status) Code indirectly recognizes polygamy and stipulates specific conditions such as provision of separate housing for each wife," said UNMIS Gender Officer Aisha Abu Al-Gasim.

The popularity of polygamy has decreased since the 1960s as levels of education have risen in Sudan's urban areas, according to Asha Elkarib, a prominent feminist and researcher of women's issues.

But the national government's embrace of polygamy may have reversed its decline by politicizing the topic, said Ms. Elkarib. "Recent years witnessed a remarkable setback (to polygamy's decrease) due to the official approach supporting the practice."

Polygamous marriages remain a source of controversy among many Sudanese women. While a few women's groups support polygamy on the grounds that some infertile wives may want to encourage their husbands to re-marry; others are demanding amendments to the Personal Status Code that would ban or restrict the practice.

Some critics say that women are not treated as equal partners by polygamous spouses. For example, a new wife is often scorned by the first wife's family and children even if the latter has personally chosen the woman in question, as is the practice in rural areas.

The real motives of a new wife are often questioned if the husband is wealthy. Conversely, a man who cannot meet the financial needs of his first wife and their children is viewed as irresponsible if he weds again.

Polygamy can often lead to the end of the first marriage because many wives simply refuse to share their husband with another woman, said Ms. Elkarib. "One of the primary reasons behind family problems such as the abandonment of the first wife and her children is related to polygamy," she said, adding that under such circumstances the husband is often reluctant to pay alimony to his estranged spouse.

The ongoing debate over polygamy has been inflamed by a recent *fatwa* (religious opinion) from Muslim scholars that legitimizes *misyar* marriage, a nuptial contract under which the woman agrees to renounce any claim for housing and financial support from her husband.

Men have no responsibility to care for the children born out of such marriages, said Ms. Elkarib, and some men and women close to the leadership of the Islamic movement are opposed to it.

Ayman Mohamed

Alex Aciga

Rising out of hardship

One of Alex Aciga's favourite proverbs has served him well in the 12 years since he left his native state of Central Equatoria for the squatter camps of Khartoum.

"Do not be like that old dog that does not learn new tactics of catching a rat in order to survive."

When he moved to the Sudanese capital in 1997, Mr. Aciga had just quit his job as director of engineering at a radio station in the city of Kadugli, Southern Kordofan State.

But with few prospects of finding similar work at a broadcasting company in Khartoum, Mr. Aciga scanned the squalid landscape of the informal settlement 15 kilometres east of the city where he was living for some type of livelihood.

The idea he hit upon came from a Korean Christian organization he had joined after arriving in the north: buy secondhand clothing from the foreign missionaries at a low price and then re-sell them at a profit to his neighbours in the Haj Yousif squatter area.

The income Mr. Aciga made from what he called a "skyrocketing undertaking" enabled him to rent a better dwelling for his family, purchase more luxurious beds to furnish the home and pay the school fees of his four children.

Government officials later expelled the missionaries in 1999 on the grounds that they were proselytizing among Muslims, a crackdown that brought the southerner's lucrative trade to an abrupt halt.

"The move dropped my business profits by 60 per cent," said Mr. Aciga, now 44 years old. "I was in despair, everything before me turned black."

His outlook became bleaker still after burglars broke into his clothing shop and made off with goods worth around 3,500 Sudanese pounds (\$1,560).

He then moved his family to the Soba Aradi informal settlement 18 kilometres to the south of Khartoum. The clothing trader reinvented himself once again, fixing radios, television sets, tape recorders and other consumer electronic appliances with the help of his family.

Before long, Mr. Aciga was earning about 50 pounds (\$22) a day at his repair workshop.

Life nonetheless remains hard for the



Alex Aciga, repairing electronics at Soba Aradi squatter area.

legions of southerners who have moved to northern Sudan to flee armed conflict or seek more remunerative work only to wind up in camps for the internally displaced.

"Do not be like that old dog that does not learn new tactics of catching a rat in order to survive."

"You can hardly find a successful Southern Sudanese trader in the north," he said. "Here, most men work as servants and mortar attendants at construction sites, and many have remained bachelors because they cannot afford the expenditures of marriage."

Some southerners discovered they had to serve in the Sudanese army for two years as a prerequisite for obtaining academic qualifications or a job offer, said Mr. Aciga.

Others converted to Islam to improve

their prospects for finding work.

Conditions are even more adverse for women, some of whom risk fines or even imprisonment for brewing liquor at home to generate some income.

Mr. Aciga also worries about the safety of the flimsy mud-brick hovels where many inhabitants of the Soba Aradi squatter settlement live.

"These houses often collapse during heavy rains," he said. "We have been forced to remain in these decaying structures because we cannot afford to rent expensive homes."

But Alex Aciga does not discourage easily. True to his proverb of survival, he has abandoned his neighbourhood repair shop to work on a master's degree at Nile Theological College in Khartoum.

His wide repertoire of practical skills has come in handy once again. In exchange for fixing faults in the college's aging electrical system, the former engineering director is pursuing his studies free of charge – a mutually convenient arrangement that has saved him 5,000 Sudanese pounds (\$2,230) in tuition bills. ■

Text and photo: James Sokiri

Women for peace

Previously a small Khartoum grassroots organization focusing on internally displaced women, Ru'ya recently rose to international acclaim when its director, Zeinab Balandia, was awarded the Women PeaceMakers Prize by the University of San Diego. *In Sudan* spoke with Ms. Balandia and other members of the organization to learn more about the group's drive to empower women.

Seeking to encourage peace and build trust among communities by empowering women, 12 female university graduates from the Nuba Mountains, Southern Kordofan State, established Ru'ya in Khartoum in 2001.

"Women can move among the communities ... maybe you'll find a woman from south Sudan married to someone in the Nuba Mountains, in the conflict area," said Zeinab Balandia, founder and director of Ru'ya, the Arabic word for "vision".

Upon returning to Sudan after a two-month trip to San Diego, where she was awarded the peace prize, Ms. Balandia spoke about one of Ru'ya's first programmes, called "Women Ambassadors for Peace".

The organization founded three women's solidarity groups, which met once a week for nine consecutive months to discuss gender and human rights themes. The women supported each other by contributing sugar, soap and coffee to one member selected on a rotational basis.

A "Tray of Peace" was run with a similar goal for a year in 2001 in partnership with the Sudan Open Learning Organization in two internally displaced persons' (IDP) camps west of Khartoum. Once a month various tribes were invited to cook a traditional dish, share it and discuss its meaning.

"Participants were eating the food and had a chance to reflect on how it tastes, how it smells, whether they like it or not," Ms. Balandia said. "We collected all these reflections and said ... we are in peace now eating one food and everyone is enjoying (it). So this is what we needed, peace to enjoy it."

Histories of displacement

Ru'ya has also strived to supply information about the displaced. "There was a question in our organization, why (do) Nuba people move from Nuba and end up in Port Sudan," the founder recalled. "There are seven states (in between), why didn't they stop in one of them?"

Seeking an answer, two women from the organization traveled to Port Sudan, where they discovered that some IDPs had not intended traveling so far north, but had been forcefully transported there in government trucks.

The findings led to a larger project conducted with the Sudanese Organization for Research and Development and the UN Development Programme in 2002, which surveyed 13 northern states to gather mainly demographical information about IDPs.

The project sought data on the history, reason and condition of displacement, finding various cases of human rights violations, including labour abuse and lack of legal protection.

Soon after the 2002 Nuba Mountains ceasefire agreement, a major change occurred in the organization's life. In 2003, Ru'ya hired a bus to transport women from northern states to meet women affiliated with the Sudan People's Liberation Army at a conference in Kauda, Southern Kordofan.

"About 35 women were traveling ... but national security stopped us just outside of Khartoum, before Jebel Awlia," the director said. As a result, three members had to attend court hearings until the case was dropped, but all the office furniture and properties were confiscated.

Six months later, Ru'ya opened a sub-office in Kadugli and in 2007 moved headquarters there, closing shop in Khartoum.

Sitting in the organization's newly acquired but humble training room in Kadugli, Food Security Coordinator Waleed Daoud said the group had held various trainings across the state. They included sessions focusing on improving the *jubraka* (kitchen garden), HIV/AIDS and female genital mutilation. Until 2009, Ru'ya also ran a centre for war-traumatized children.

From cook to engineer

Although funds have since become scarce, some income-generating activities have continued, including seed distribution and marketing training, according to Zeinab's sister Hawa Balandia, capacity building coordinator.

In 2009, they also ran a food production and processing workshop for several hundred women around Kauda on the art



Zeinab Balandia showing her award at UNMIS headquarters.

"We are in peace now eating one food and everyone is enjoying (it). So this is what we needed, peace to enjoy it."

of making pumpkin jam and juice from wild fruits.

An exceptional Ru'ya project, which the director called "real empowerment of women", recently trained four illiterate, elderly ladies in solar panel management.

The women studied at India's Barefoot College for six months, returning as trainers and engineers to Miri and Derod villages, which they would electrify as soon as funds were acquired for solar panels.

As the founders of the organization had all been working on a volunteer basis, many sought employment in 2006 mainly with non-profit organizations, UN agencies and UNMIS.

"Zeinab is the only one of the founding members who has stayed on with Ru'ya," said Hwaida Omer, a founder now working with UNMIS Human Rights in Kadugli, adding that some original members were following the organization's activities on an advisory board.

The recent trip to the United States further inspired Ms. Balandia to work towards networking the solidarity groups, which have increased to 170 groups in number. She also hoped to establish a women's solidarity bank for micro-credit projects.

"I really want to see Ru'ya stand strongly," said the peace prize winner. ■

Text and photo: Eszter Farkas

“Humanitarian stability in Darfur”

After two and a half years as Resident Humanitarian Coordinator and Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General to Sudan, Ameerah Haq left the mission in mid-December to take up her new post as Special Representative of the Secretary-General at the UN Integrated Mission in Timor-Leste. Before she left, Ms. Haq spoke with *In Sudan* about the country's humanitarian situation during her stay in the country.

In Sudan: What were your biggest challenges when you arrived in Sudan?

Ameerah Haq: The sheer size of the country was one. Another was the atmosphere of mistrust between the international humanitarian community and the government, which made it difficult to establish dialogue. We overcame this in slow steps by ensuring that the government understood the principles of the humanitarian community and what it was here for.

After the expulsion of the 13 NGOs (non-governmental organizations) in March (2009) from Darfur, the government recognized that an international presence was needed. We moved immediately to do a joint assessment of the situation (with the government) and since then the atmosphere has improved. Last week, we had a meeting with the government on protection in an atmosphere of constructive dialogue. This would not have happened in the past.

Are the effects of the NGO expulsion still being felt?

There are still remaining gaps. Part of this is due to security reasons – for example, the recent kidnappings (in Darfur). It's difficult to reach the deep field.

The quality of humanitarian aid is still not up to what 6,000 people from 13 NGOs could do. However, the government, the remaining NGOs and the UN have stepped up their assistance. The US Special Envoy has also been critical in turning things around.

It helps that there are now new re-hatted international NGOs – for instance, OXFAM UK has been replaced by OXFAM USA. Most, in fact, have been replaced.

What have been the main achievements since you arrived?

We have achieved humanitarian stability in Darfur. We have achieved dialogue with the government and worked jointly to set up mechanisms to address humanitarian concerns. One is the High Level Committee, which has expanded to include representatives of the AU (African Union), China and Russia, and now has branches at the state level.

Another mechanism is the Joint Verification Mechanism for Returns. We are trying to work with the government to allow the IOM (International Organization for Migration) and UNHCR (UN High Commissioner for Refugees) to ensure returns are voluntary and appropriate. People are returning throughout the region seasonally in very small pockets, not in the large amounts the government states. The IOM has verified that 95 per cent are voluntary.

What are the principle challenges that remain?

Safety and security is a big one, especially, as I said, with the recurrent kidnappings. The kidnappers operate with impunity. No perpetrators have been brought to justice.

Another concern is drought, both in Darfur and Southern Sudan. The water tables are dropping, which will affect next year's harvest in April and May, worsening food security in Darfur and the south. Also, in southern states like Jonglei and Warrap, people have been displaced by the LRA (Lord's Resistance Army) and inter-tribal conflicts, so food and security are big issues there as well.

Another concern is that we are focusing so much on humanitarian response, we are unable to concentrate on recovery and development. People outside the camps need early recovery assistance.

In Sudan as a whole, we are also looking at high rates of maternal mortality, particularly in the east around Kassala. A lot needs to be done in advocating with the government and the GoSS (Government of Southern Sudan) about this problem.

As the leader of the country team, I've seen that each of the 17 agencies here is doing a lot in building capacity, clearing mines and helping with community security. The most urgent need is food, and the international community has been very responsive to this. About 76 per cent of last year's appeal for \$2 billion has been



Ameerah Haq greeting Darfuri girl.
Photo: Office of UN Resident Humanitarian Coordinator.

funded.

How do you feel about leaving Sudan?

I have mixed feelings. I'm leaving at a critical time in Sudanese history, with the elections, referendum, and other key CPA (Comprehensive Peace Agreement) benchmarks coming up. I think 2010 will be a momentous year.

What would you advise your replacement?

As I said, next year will be a challenging one. Much needs to happen on the political side in terms of border demarcation, the referendum and other remaining issues. We must ensure that ministries and agencies pay sufficient attention to humanitarian assistance, that it doesn't get sidetracked.

Are you looking forward to your next post in East Timor?

Yes, I'm very excited about it. I'm looking forward to the challenges there, although the scale will be very different from here, much smaller. East Timor's entire population is about equal to Nyala's of 1.2 million. Recently, there have been signs of stability there and I look forward to understanding the key issues.

Do you have any parting words?

I wish everyone well. The people of Sudan have suffered enormously throughout their long civil war and the protracted conflict in Darfur. I hope peace will prevail and people will be able to go back to their normal lives. ■

What happened in

2009

In addition, it achieved significant headway in supporting crucial milestones of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) like voter registration, police training, child protection and Abyei.

GoSS police officers during Special Weapons and Tactics training by UNMIS Police in Khartoum. Photo: UNMIS/Johann Hattingh



Victims of inter-tribal violence in Jonglei State
Photo: UNMIS/Tim McKulka.

of an attack by Murle tribesmen against a temporary fishing camp inhabited by Lou Nuer villagers in the Jonglei State county of Akobo on 2 August. The raid killed 161 people, most of whom were women and children. UNMIS subsequently airlifted 160 SPLA soldiers to the stricken area to stabilize security conditions on the ground.

The mission rendered a similar service after soldiers guarding the compound of SPLA Deputy Commander-in-Chief Lt. Gen. Paulino

Matip in the Unity State capital of Bentiu exchanged gunfire with other SPLA soldiers stationed at the local governor's headquarters on 2 October. An estimated 300 troops assigned to Lt. Gen. Matip's compound fled the city after the fighting subsided. UNMIS aircraft later ferried those soldiers to Juba for re-deployment to the SPLA unit assigned to protect GoSS President Salva Kiir Mayardit.

Perhaps the most ambitious instance of pro-active peacekeeping began in Jonglei State with the establishment of two UNMIS temporary operating bases in the flashpoints of Akobo and Pibor counties on 10 May. Each base was staffed with approximately 120 soldiers and robust

UNMIS helped launch the much-awaited Sudan Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) programme in 2009 and also moved quickly to defuse tensions in the aftermath of violent clashes in several hot spots in the southern region of the country.



Weapons being demolished at launch of Juba DDR programme. Photo: UNMIS/Tim McKulka.

The first signs of what proved to be the most violent year in Southern Sudan since the signing of the CPA erupted during celebrations marking the accord's fourth anniversary in the Upper Nile State capital of Malakal. Fighting between Dinka and Shilluk tribesmen on 9 January triggered more clashes in the city that killed 12 people and displaced an estimated 6,000 residents.

UNMIS responded swiftly to the next outbreak of violence in the city in late February. The unexpected arrival in Malakal of the former militia commander Gabriel Tangyangi on 24 February triggered deadly clashes between elements of the Joint Integrated Unit (JIU) belonging to the Sudan Armed Forces and the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA).

The Malakal violence left at least 62 people dead and 94 wounded, but quickly ended after an UNMIS aircraft flew Vice-President Riek Machar of the Government of Southern Sudan (GoSS) to the town to negotiate a cease-fire. The Ceasefire Joint Military Commission chaired by the UNMIS Force Commander worked closely with the State Security Committee to disengage warring elements of the JIU.

A second example of the mission's quick reaction to serious unrest occurred in the aftermath



Victims of fighting in Malakal receiving treatment at the hospital. Photo: UNMIS/Johann Hattingh.



Identity card used during DDR launch in Ed Damazin. Photo: UNMIS/Johann Hattingh.

air and river patrols were conducted throughout the area over the ensuing 60 days.

The Sudan DDR programme was launched in the Blue Nile State capital of Ed Damazin on 10 February, and the reintegration component of the exercise commenced six weeks later. Similar programmes were later unveiled in the states of Southern Kordofan, Central Equatoria and Lakes. By the end of 2009, some 18,731 ex-combatants had been demobilized across the country. Another DDR programme was scheduled to kick off in the Northern Bahr El-Ghazal state capital of Aweil in early 2010.

The mission's Electoral

Bumper sticker urging people to register, Juba. Photo: UNMIS/Tim McKulka.



Voter registration for April 2010 national elections, Juba. Photo: UNMIS/Tim McKulka.



Assistance Division (EAD) provided technical help and logistical support to the National Elections Commission (NEC), the Southern Sudan High Committee and the 25 state-level high committees. The EAD played a vital support role in the run-up to voter registration, which began in nearly all state capitals across the country as scheduled on 1 November.

As a positive development on the political front in 2009, the National Congress Party (NCP) and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) accepted the 22 July ruling by the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) in the Hague on the Abyei boundary dispute. A boundary demarcation committee was appointed in the wake of the court's ruling, but its work has proceeded slowly.

The annual Misseriya migration into disputed areas inhabited by Dinka Ngok

communities went off relatively peacefully. UNMIS supported the convening of direct meetings among Dinka Ngok and Misseriya leaders and government officials in the aftermath of the arbitration court's ruling on the Abyei boundary dispute.

Marauding bands of gunmen belonging to the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) continued to terrorize communities living near Southern Sudan's border with the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Central African Republic.

At least 200 people were killed and another 130 kidnapped during LRA attacks in Western and Central Equatoria states

by these raids. But the scale and frequency of LRA attacks in the area declined as the year proceeded, and its gunmen broke up into small, isolated groups with little ability to mount serious raids deep inside Sudanese territory.

The Sudanese political calendar was marred by rising tensions between the country's two leading political parties and the unprecedented issuing of an arrest warrant against President Omar Al-Bashir by the International Criminal Court, which was announced on 4 March. The Sudanese government responded by expelling 13 international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) from the strife-torn Darfur region of the country and shutting down three local NGOs.



Law students protesting ICC arrest warrant issued against President Omar Al-Bashir. Photo: UNMIS/Johann Hattingh.

The SPLM and GoSS President Kiir publicly rejected the official results of the 2008 national census on the grounds that residents in the country's 10 southern states had been undercounted, while figures for the population of the three Darfur states were allegedly inflated.

Continued bickering between the NCP and SPLM stalled efforts in the National Assembly to approve enabling legislation for the Southern Sudan and Abyei referenda slated for January 2011. The two parties finally agreed on a draft bill addressing the referenda, which was approved by a special parliamentary committee on 30 December.

In an effort to emphasize the vital importance of considering post-referenda scenarios to ensure a peaceful implementation of the agreement, UNMIS held a major symposium on Unity and Prospects of Self Determination in early November. The event engaged Sudanese political players, the intelligentsia and general public in a healthy debate over the future of the country post 2011.

Finally, UNMIS witnessed a tragedy on 22 October 2009, when its Deputy Force Commander Brigadier Moin-Ud-Din Ahmed was murdered while on leave in his home country Pakistan. ■

during a nine-month-long period ending in September 2009, and tens of thousands of Southern Sudanese have been displaced



Residents of Abyei celebrating the decision of the Permanent Court of Arbitration. Photo: UNMIS/Tim McKulka.

Saving the wildlife

Sitting in his grass-thatched office at Mushera Game Reserve, Warrap State's director of wildlife said poachers came all the way from Libya to kill animals in Southern Sudan.

Poaching was especially prevalent in Warrap's large national game park, Damarkea, said Brig. Gen. Deng Boug. "It has a wide variety of animals because of its wealth of natural resources like water and green pastures."

Once abundant, the region's wildlife was decimated by the country's two-decade long civil war, becoming either food for soldiers or fleeing to the neighbouring countries of Uganda, Ethiopia, Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) or Kenya.

With the coming of peace, animals had been returning in increasing numbers, noted Western Bahr El-Ghazal Acting Director of Wildlife Services Brig. Gen. Eimillio Alue Wol. "Wildlife wardens have found many elephants and more than 17 white rhinos in Mapel Game Reserve and the Southern National Park."

But rampant poaching by both local and foreign hunters could drive away the hesitantly returning herds and reduce the numbers of those which had remained.

Among the perpetrators were heavily armed poachers from the Central African Republic and DRC as well as Ugandan Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) rebels, according to Northern Bahr El-Ghazal State Director of Wildlife Brig. Gen. Deng Tang Jok.

"Nomadic tribes also

come from South Darfur to Raja County forest, hunting elephant and rhinoceros tusks as well as leopard skin," the general added.

Local poachers in Western Bahr El-Ghazal fell into two groups, according to Brig. Gen. Wol. One killed animals for meat to sell in raising money for dowries, while the other hunted them for food.

Warrap State Director Boug lamented that the Southern Sudanese Wildlife Forces (law enforcement arm of Government of Southern Sudan Ministry of Wildlife Conservation and Tourism) could do little to stop the poachers, as they lacked transportation, communications and weapons.

"It is hard for us game soldiers to patrol the park because we don't have guns to fight the poachers," said Emmanuel John Deng, a radio operator in Warrap State wildlife forces. "Another problem facing wildlife services is the lack of radio ... facilities."

Brig. Gen. Wol Aleu urged the Government of Southern Sudan to disarm civilians and strengthen wildlife forces to fight poachers and create secure passage for tourists to games reserves and national parks.

Stressing that wildlife was a more important natural resource than petroleum,

Tonj South National Park Director Lt. Col. Akan Machar Akan noted that poaching carried a heavy penalty. The punishment for killing elephants was 10 cows for each one killed, while a white rhino could earn the perpetrator death.

Members of the wildlife forces were also among the casualties, said Brig. Gen. Wol. Some 21 of them had been killed by poachers between 1991 and 2009. This year alone, six gamekeepers had died, allegedly due to the presence of the LRA and poachers from the north, he said.

Brig. Gen. Jok said the GoSS was taking strong measures against the killing of animals, training some 600 soldiers for the Anti-Poaching Force to protect wildlife.

Also lacking were orphanages or zoos for the animals, where they could be scientifically studied or those close to extinction kept safe from poachers. When people catch animals and hand them over to the wildlife services, officials have no choice but to return them to the perils of the forest.

Wau Zoo, set up in 1951 along the Nar el Jur River, was once a leading park in Greater Bahr El-Ghazal, according to Brig. Gen. Wol. About 158 square kilometres in size, the zoo once had a wide variety of wildlife and birds, but the animals were left to their own fate during the war and the cages were now empty but for a few reptiles and monkeys. ■

*Text and photo:
Emmanuel Kackoul*



Brig. Deng Boug (third from right) with wildlife wardens, Warrap State.

Everywhere a hotel

As business booms and tourists trickle in, the mere handful of hotels in Sudan when its civil war ended in 2005 has grown into more than 130 registered lodgings.

The capital Khartoum now has 70 classified hotels, including three at the five-star level, said Ministry of Tourism and Wildlife International Relations Director Gasm Elseed.

He added that most hotel guests in Khartoum were business people or government officials, as tourism in the country had yet to kick off. Citing World Tourism Organization figures, the ministry director noted that only about 30 per cent of some 400,000 visitors to Sudan in 2008 were actual tourists.

"Most tourists arrived from Egypt by boat to visit archaeological sites in the northern desert or flew directly to the Red Sea diving area," rather than passing through Khartoum, Mr. Elseed said.

Birthe Overby, owner of Khartoum's Bougainvillea guesthouse, conceded that few tourists stayed at her three-star facility, which catered mainly to development officials or mid-level business people.

But the number of tourists at her 19-room hotel had increased to about two per month since a route opened from Khartoum to Addis Ababa two years ago, Ms. Overby said. "We had an older couple in their 70s come through in a Rolls Royce Silver Spirit driving from Capetown to London."

The five-star Burj Al-Fateh hotel, which mainly attracts the upper corporate and government market, also houses few tourists in its 230 rooms, according to the general manager, Voker Mandlowsky. "We get the odd tourist, about 10 per month, who come for car rallies or to visit their families. There is very little leisure business."

The Al-Fateh manager felt tourism was unlikely to increase in the near future due to costly visas and lack of infrastructure, while his general occupancy rate would depend on events in the country. "We will wait to see the result of the elections and its effect on business."

Ministry director Elseed admitted that tourism in Sudan had been stalled by the high 224 SDG (\$100) cost for visas and lengthy delays in obtaining them, along with police registry and airport exit fees of about 53 SDG (\$24) each.

"We are working hard to reduce the visa expense and time to get it," he said, adding that the documents could

"We had an older couple in their 70s come through in a Rolls Royce Silver Spirit driving from Capetown to London."



Reception area of Bougainville Guest House, Khartoum. Credit. Photo: UNMIS/Catherine Waugh.

be obtained more quickly through the country's 10 registered tour operators.

Influx of business people

Some 66 registered hotels have sprung up over the past five years in the Southern Sudanese capital of Juba, which also cater mainly to an influx of business people, government officials and international organizations, according to Laura Tetelino, Director of Hotels in the Government of Southern Sudan Ministry of Tourism and Wildlife Conservation.

The city's oldest and one of only two lodging facilities in 2005 was Juba Hotel, in operation since 1936. The hotel previously housed mainly government officials, including at one time the late Sudanese President Jaafar Nimeiri, but is now used by tourists and businesses as well as for public events.

The hotel's manager, Simon Malual of Global Property Management, is currently seeking a reliable

Juba hotel in 1936.



company to renovate the decaying facility. "We want to maintain the old structure ... it's a permanent structure, not prefab like other newly established hotels in Juba today."

In a prime city centre location within easy reach of the airport, the hotel charges reasonable rates for its self-contained rooms and meals. "I expect many people to come to the hotel after the renovation ... after finishing we will advertise it," said Mr. Malual.

Nearby is the Equatoria Hotel, which has been rented by the Government of Southern Sudan since 2005, according to its manager, Hamed Ahmed Hamed of Southern Line Company for Tourist and Transport.

Open since 1974 and the only one in town besides Juba Hotel at war's end, the 20-room lodging facility, which has a conference room and a restaurant, initially attracted ministry officials and UN staff. "In 2005, some UN staff stayed here when they came to open the UN Mission in Sudan here in Juba."

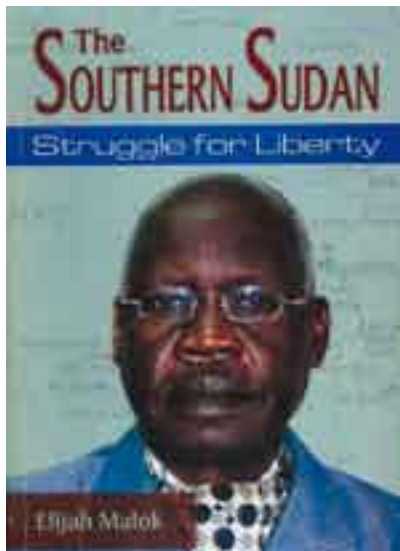
Now, Equatoria's clients include business people from Khartoum, Kenya, Uganda and Dubai, Mr. Hamed said.

Ministry director Tetelino noted that tourism in the south had been stalled by poor roads, airstrips and bridges as well as insecurity and limited funding.

To attract more tourists, the government and private sector were working to improve the region's shattered infrastructure, she said.

"Soon this will be completed, and we will advertise our tourist potential to the outside world," said Ms. Tetelino, adding that the region possessed six national parks, wildlife, mountains, rivers and cultural heritage. ■

Taban Kenyi and Catherine Waugh



Elijah Malok is best known today as the head of the central bank of the Government of Southern Sudan (GoSS).

But the 72-year-old president of the Bank of Southern Sudan is also a living, breathing throwback to a bygone era in the country's history, one of the last of a vanishing generation of Southern Sudanese who were born under British rule, came of age around the time of Sudan's independence in 1956, and survived two civil wars.

Mr. Malok has chronicled his life and times in the recently published book *The Southern Sudan Struggle for Liberty* (Kenway Publications, 2009). He traces the region's evolution from forgotten imperial backwater to an autonomous entity with ambitions of full sovereignty through a wealth of first-hand accounts, documents and analysis.

The product of a Twic Dinka family, Mr. Malok grew up near the present-day Jonglei State capital of Bor. He entered politics in the early 1960s as a high school student in Juba who sided with exiled Southern Sudanese leaders like Father Saturnino Lohure and William Deng Nhial in their opposition to the autocratic rule of Sudan's first military strongman, Gen. Ibrahim Abboud.

Mr. Malok later left the country in 1962 to join a newly formed political party called the Sudan African Closed District Union.

The Southern Sudanese party took its name from a controversial 1922 ordinance promulgated by the British to sharply curtail contact between North and Southern Sudan and thus contain the spread of Islam and Arabization in the south.

Under this policy, says Mr. Malok, Southern Sudan became "a closed and restricted human zoo" that was condemned to a protracted state of arrested development during the remainder of the colonial era.

From backwater to autonomy

In his view, Britain compounded its perfidy by reversing course and endorsing a united, post-colonial Sudan during the years leading up to independence.

Southern Sudan's ensuing quest for the right to self-determination provides the overriding theme of the book. Mr. Malok traces the first public demand for that right to a national conference held in Juba by the now defunct Liberal Party in 1955.

Mr. Malok spent most of the 1960s and early 1970s in exile and only returned to Southern Sudan after the signing of the 1972 Addis Ababa peace accords that ended the country's first civil war.

That treaty established an autonomous government in the south based in Juba, and his candid review of that 11-year experiment in limited self-rule delivers some of the book's most illuminating material.

Drawing on his experiences as a civil servant in the regional government's ministry of finance, Mr. Malok gives an unflinching account of the various corruption scandals that dogged the first autonomous administration led by Abel Alier. None of those affairs directly implicated Mr. Alier, who now serves as chairman of the National Elections Commission.

His refreshingly frank assessment of Southern Sudanese triumphs and failures is not confined to the distant past. Though Mr. Malok held a series of prominent military and civilian posts in the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A) during the country's second civil war, he does not shrink from addressing head-on the human rights abuses committed by the SPLA.

The manuscript could have used a more meticulous editor. The book contains some egregious factual errors such as the year when the armed rebellion in Darfur began (he dates it only back to 2004).

Mr. Malok highlights the signing of the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement in the book's preface, yet the chapter of

conclusions seems to have been finished five years earlier and was never updated.

"In order to stop the war and usher in an era of peace," Mr. Malok asserts incongruously in the final pages, "there has to be a political settlement acceptable to the populations of Sudan."

By his own account, Mr. Malok was one of the "doubting Thomases" who never expected the Kenyan-mediated peace talks to produce the historic accords that ended 22 years of civil war. Today, he writes, he feels "privileged to be part of the unfolding debate about the future of Southern Sudan." The final chapter of that debate is likely to unfold over the next 12 months. ■

Joseph Contreras

Coming events

Movie nights

21 and 28 January, 7.30 p.m.

If you fancy open air cinema, visit the terrace of the French Cultural Centre in Khartoum and watch the Clint Eastwood-directed *Gran Torino* about a war veteran, and a French comedy the following week about a mail train robbery with Jean-Paul Belmondo, titled *The Brain*. Free entry.

Two Niles and 120 languages

27 January, 7.30 p.m.

Two experts give an overview of Sudan's rich linguistic heritage at the French Cultural Centre, followed by a discussion.

Conference of the Birds

29 January, 7.30 p.m.

The Khartoum International Community School presents an adaptation of a book of poems by the Persian author Farid ud-Din Attar. The play is about the journey of life and what one might find if they look deeply inside themselves and their surroundings.



The World Bank recently published a photographic documentary illustrating the challenges of post-conflict Sudan and results achieved since the Comprehensive Peace Agreement.

Classified by sectors including education, agriculture, health and water, the book highlights achievements by the Government of National Unity with the assistance of the Multi Donor Trust Fund – National, and is freely available at The World Bank office and PIO display shelves at UNMIS headquarters in Khartoum.

NEWS BRIEFS

Pakistanis repair road for IDP convoy



The Pakistani Engineering Company completed extensive repairs on a badly deteriorated road in the Kurmuk area to promote the return of internally displaced persons from the Blue Nile State capital of Ed Damazin to the community of Bonj.

The 33-member Pakistani team was deployed in the field for 10 days to strengthen, harden and level a 47-kilometre stretch of road between Kurmuk and Chali. They finished the job on 10 December, and the newly renovated road simplified the task of moving a convoy of Mabaan IDPs from Ed Damazin to Mabaan in mid-December.

"The road from Kurmuk to Chali had always been a matter of grave concern, as any movement beyond Kurmuk used to be exceptionally difficult," noted Pakistani Engineering Company Commander Muhammad Anwaar Shaikh as the project ended.

"I am sure this small but significant step towards improvement of infrastructure will ... make a difference."

Over 1,200 IDPs and their belongings were transported in two separate convoys on 7 and 14 December and reached their destination of Bonj on the day after departure. Approximately 6,750 displaced persons remain in the Kurmuk and Ed Damazin areas.

Abyei Administration reopens dialogue between Misseriya and Dinka Ngok

The Abyei Area Administration (AAA) sponsored four village hall meetings between representatives of the Misseriya and Dinka Ngok tribes during the first half of December 2009. They represented the first talks to take place between the rival groups since the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) issued its ruling on the disputed borders of the Abyei area last July.

UNMIS and the UN Development Programme (UNDP) supported the AAA's initiative that involved visits to four *payams* located along key migration routes. The tour of the Abyei area was intended to promote inter-ethnic dialogue and assure communities that geographical boundaries need not affect their centuries-old nomadic lifestyle.

The Administration's message of "boundaries are not barriers" was positively received by the estimated 4,000 people who participated in the meetings held in Leu, Diffra, Um Khaer and Rum Ameer.

"I thought that the PCA ruling confines us to our area with an electric fence boundary," said Ali Kuku, an elderly Misseriya nomad in Leu, as he welcomed the AAA effort to reopen dialogue between his people and the Dinka Ngok. "Now I know it's not true."

Ngok Dinka paramount chief Amir Kuol Deng noted that lines of communication and mutual trust needed to be built. All participants highlighted the need for an agreement on security-related modalities to facilitate the upcoming annual Misseriya migration.

Concerns were also raised about access to water, education for nomadic youth, women's development issues, and health and infrastructure needs. Acting Abyei Administrator Rahma Abdelrahman Al-Noor proposed an inter-state dialogue that would bring in representatives from Unity, Southern Kordofan and Warrap states.

The 22 July ruling from the PCA in The Hague on the area's disputed geographical boundaries was promptly accepted by both the National Congress Party and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement. But relations between the Misseriya and the Dinka Ngok have been strained by armed clashes and simmering tensions.

The AAA leadership was joined in the meetings by a number of security bodies ranging from the police and national security to the Joint Integrated Unit and the Area Joint Military Committee.

OHCHR launches report on LRA attacks

Brutal attacks on civilians by members of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) in Southern Sudan could constitute crimes against humanity, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) said in a report formally issued on 21 December in the Western Equatoria State capital of Yambio.

According to the report, the 27 confirmed attacks staged by the LRA between 15 December 2008 and 10 March 2009 killed 81 civilians. Many other victims were injured, maimed, raped or abducted. The OHCHR report also accuses the LRA of pillaging and even destroying villages, which has displaced over 38,000 people in the Southern Sudanese states of Western and Central Equatoria.

The report asserts that the brutality associated with the LRA attacks has been "consistent, deliberate and egregious".

Speaking at the presentation of the report, Western Equatoria State Governor Jemma Nunu Kumba said, "The main challenge of the state since 2006 has been insecurity caused by the LRA." The governor also noted that many people in the state who had been uprooted by LRA raids were enduring poor humanitarian conditions in camps and the homes of relatives where they had sought refuge.

The governor commended the United Nations for its swift response in assisting victims of the violence, and she asked for more help to halt additional LRA atrocities.

UN Deputy Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator Lise Grande said, "The human cost caused by the LRA is not only enormous but also unacceptable." According to Ms. Grande, 200 people have been killed and another 150 kidnapped during 154 attacks perpetrated by the LRA. An estimated 80,000 people have been internally displaced, she added.

Ms. Grande said that more than 20 agencies based in 27 locations around Western Equatoria State were helping the population. She noted that the Government of Southern Sudan and the Sudan People's Liberation Army had primary responsibility for protecting civilians in the country's 10 southern states.

The report urges the international community and governments in the region to cooperate with the International Criminal Court in its pursuit and prosecution of LRA leaders accused of war crimes and crimes against humanity.

