

PRESS RELEASE

DDR sensitization mission in El Srief, North Darfur



El Fasher, 26 July 2011 – A sensitization programme to disseminate messages on Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) and Small Arms Control was organized yesterday in El Srief locality, situated 45 kilometers North of El Fasher, North Darfur, by African Union-United Nations Mission in Darfur (UNAMID), UN Development Program (UNDP) and the Sudan DDR Commission (SDDRC); in active coordination with other relevant UN agencies like UNICEF.

With a total population of approximately 8,500 and 10 villages spread over an area of 20 Square kilometres, the community of El Srief has also been the recipient of a groundbreaking Community Security and Arms Control (CSAC) pilot programme during the last months, implemented by UNDP partner, the local NGO, Friends of Peace and Development (FPDO).

Yesterday's outreach began with the distribution of 40,000 liters of water, provided by UNAMID. Meanwhile a UNICEF project for construction and rehabilitation of water pumps in the area is currently underway. The need for water is one of the main concerns of the population, who has to walk about 10 km to collect water, an activity that not only takes several hours of treacherous trek but also has serious security ramifications.

The event was aimed at raising community awareness on the DDR process and enhancing their understanding of the community security and small arms control and peace and reconciliation issues in the region through songs, dances, puppet shows and the dramatic styling of local performance artists.

As UNAMID DDR officer, Joan Bao-in, remarked during her opening speech, "we came here today to share with you a message – through songs, drama, and dancing. They are not just to entertain. We are here with some of Sudan's finest performers – and these performers have messages for each and



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every one of us: messages of unity, peace, messages about the dangers of arms. We came here with the message that proliferation of uncontrolled weapons can kill.”

FPDO’s recent work in the community – the establishment and training of security sub-committees alongside focus group discussions and briefings on vulnerable groups has been instructive in bringing about a more permanent and sustainable culture of peace within the community. As FPDO Child Protection officer, Hussein Elsherif, said “here we sent the arms control message on a daily basis. For example, people used to use guns to celebrate, shooting in the air, but we discussed it and the community agreed not to do that anymore. We want to send a message of peace and coexistence among the community.” The local Umda (community leader), Ali Ahmed Bahid concurred, “when FPDO came, the peace agreement was already signed but they brought massive awareness on peace, reconciliation, weapons and explosive devices. These topics have been very important to us.”

While the Umda noted that there was still concern regarding the speedy completion of the water pumps and other development projects, he also seemed buoyant regarding the prospects for harmony and reconciliation among his people. “We are people of peace – we have no more weapons. If you come here to live for one year, you will not see one weapon,” he mentioned.



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