

Two examples of joint mediation by VOND's representatives and the Women's Alliance for Peace (WAP) in Darfur

The ongoing war in Darfur

In 2003 war erupted in Darfur, the Western region of Sudan, when the people protested against the marginalization of the area. Since Sudan gained its independent status in 1965, the region had been seriously neglected in terms of power sharing, economic development and the provision of services. Initially there were only two rebel groups but gradually they divided into more than 20 warring factions, the divisions fuelled by tribal conflict which dragged the region down into a state of chaos. Tribal fighting became usual in Darfur gradually intensifying, leading to thousands of deaths and injuries and forcing many more thousands to flee their homes. Tribal clashes are usually triggered by land disputes, pasture rights, cattle thefts and fighting over water resources as land ownership in Darfur is divided on a tribal basis, most of the tribes owning an area called a Hakura. Some tribes, more especially nomads, do not possess a Hakura of their own and live on the land of other tribes which results in tribal fighting. The Darfur local governments appointed mediators (Ajaweed) to help in keeping the peace and to mediate between fighting tribes. Those appointed are impartial individuals trusted by the community, like ex-police officers and retired judges. Private mediators are chosen mainly from the native administrators.

The first example of mediation by WAP Darfur: North Darfur

In North Darfur, the Barti and the Zayadia started attacking each other in March 2015 while during the same period, the LEAP learning event was organized in El Fashir, the capital of North Darfur. The fights were ongoing at the time of the LEAP meeting, causing death, injury and the displacement of many people. A cease fire was called, followed by a fragile, temporary agreement to stop the aggression.

The LEAP participants decided to intervene. They planned to offer three mediation workshops with women; one in the city of Milliet, exclusively for the Barti tribe, another in Kuma, exclusively for the Zayadiya tribe, and a third meeting in El-Fashir, for the two tribes and impartial participants from other tribes. The proposed title for the workshops was "Mending the social fabric and the calming of tempers". It did not seem to be appropriate to talk about reconciliation, because it was a little too soon after the mediators had managed to cobble together the fragile cease-fire between the two tribes. The situation in the area was tense and people were still cautious about travelling in the area

for fear of the activities of armed bandits. However, despite the anticipated danger WAP Darfur went ahead with the implementation.



The first workshop was in Milliet organized on the 19th of April for a group of 52 participants; there were a number of men included but the majority were women. The workshop started with a long prayer, condolences and the presentation of speeches on the role of women in building peace; advocacy and the promotion of the principles of peace; the role of customs and traditions in conflict resolution and peaceful coexistence in Darfur; the role of

religion in making peace. The participants were given the chance to discuss and argue and during the event the sadness, the sorrow and the grievances of the women became very obvious. The participants claimed the existence of hidden agendas behind the war, a war by proxy. The women mediators had information which led them to believe that the intention of the two parties was to escalate the war after the elections. During the workshops they made a strong plea to the combatants and the war lords to stop the escalation. Many useful recommendations came out of this workshop. The participants expressed their satisfaction with the workshop and the solidarity of this group of women leaders from civil society. They concluded saying that they were eager to have the war parties sign a strong and lasting peace agreement.



The second day another group of women representing WAP-Darfur drove to Al-Kuma County to perform the same task. In Kuma they asked the host, herself a member of WAP-Darfur, to invite a majority of women rather than men from the different institutions. However, the entire government body insisted on attending the meeting, so in the end there were more men than women. They spoke at length claiming that the Zayadiya are a peaceful tribe, forced to enter this war through continued provocation. The claim

of a hidden agenda behind the war was confirmed by this group too, and the claim was made that some people trade in war in terms of weapons, ammunition and political gains. It became clear that land ownership was one of the most important factors in creating animosity. The citizenship rights of nomads (including rights on land) were guaranteed by the law but not enforced due to the lack of demarcation of boundaries. "We only demand the administrative recognition of our property rights" they argued.

Both tribes agreed to comply with the recommendations of the WAP-Darfur mediators to honour the women's cry for peace and to form peace agreements. However the third intended workshop in El-Fashir which was to include the participation of the two groups and some impartial participants from the town, could not take place. Unfortunately, the Barti head of the native administration found the time inappropriate for a joint meeting. He promised to work towards reaching a peace agreement with the Zayadiya and to fully comply with such an agreement when implemented. WAP-Darfur had no choice but to halt the workshop of El-Fashir. Three months later the leaders of the Barti and the Zayadiya tribes signed an agreement on the cessation of hostilities in July 2015.

[The second example of mediation by WAP-Darfur: South Darfur](#)

The Salamat and the Fallata tribes fought each other twice, in March 2015 and August 2015. The Salamat is a small tribe scattered within the states of Darfur but they do not possess a Hakura and they live in the Habbaniya land, bordering the Fallata.

This time, the women from WAP-Darfur had their learning event in Nyala, the capital of South Darfur. Conscious of the fighting going on around them, the participants worked out a plan of action formulating a Women's Manifesto for Peace and Reconciliation in Darfur, which was presented to the regional government. Following the manifesto, they decided to engage again in a concerted mediation effort. WAP-Darfur asked for a meeting with the chief mediator to learn more about the

case and organized workshops based on that knowledge. The women mediators organized five workshops, three of them with the members of the Consultative Councils (Shura councils) of the Salamat, the Fallata and the Habbaniya tribes. The program was composed of four speeches: an introduction by LEAP's coordinator on the UNSCR1325 and the previous mediation in North Darfur between the Barti and the Zayadiya tribes which ended in peace; a second speech by the chair of WAP-Darfur on the role of women in making peace, with a plea for the decision makers to take the lead in ending the war immediately; a third speech about the advantages of peaceful co-existence; and finally a powerful speech by the local religious leader. He reminded the participants about the consequences of war, the legitimate ways in Islam of responding to assault, and the rules on self-defence in the case of a person or a group who are attacked. When the floor was given over to the tribal elite, their leaders had to answer questions on why and what were the reasons for fighting and what they believed to be the solutions. WAP-Darfur was then alerted to the fact that the Consultative Councils were not fully representative of the decision makers of the tribes in that area. The women were advised to meet those leaders of the native administration who make decisions about war; i.e., the Omad (native mayors), the Agieds (commanders), the Amirs and the Hakkamat (war praise singers).



Meanwhile, both tribes started to prepare themselves for a new escalation of the war; witnesses reported that crowds from both tribes had marched towards the battlefield to support their fellow tribesmen, pointing to the inability of the state's security forces to extend its control over the tribal clashes. Realising the situation, the women mediators from WAP Darfur approached the radio-broadcasting channels to send a strong plea to both sides

to stop the escalation, requesting them to wait for the women's mediation. Through this action, the state government was alerted and immediately sent military reinforcements to contain the situation and to prevent further clashes, whereupon the crowds scattered. The women's initiative created disquiet among the stakeholders. It seems that the men felt both surprised and insulted that women could take such an initiative and be effective in stopping the violence. With the same goal in mind, the various male leaders then started making moves towards each other and some of the Habbaniya elite from the local government hurried to mediate. The result was a ceasefire agreement along with a promise to hold a peace conference in Buram (the Habbaniya County) in order to reach a final, lasting peace between the two tribes.

The women went on to organize workshops with the leaders of the native administration. WAP Darfur first met the Salamat and then the Fallata leaders, and asked for a convincing religious leader to join the meeting. The intervention had to be restricted in order not to jeopardize the deal made by the Habbaniya public authorities to hold a peace conference, so when the participants arrived in Nyala for the workshop, they found the men dominated the mission. In the workshops, the war lords were invited to present their view on the situation. The men welcomed the women's initiative to bring peace, and they considered it a new experience to have women refuting the stereotypical negative role of women (referring to the role of the female Hakkamat mainly as war agitators). One of the outcomes of the workshops was a better understanding of the intentions of the Fallata towards the Habbaniya. The latter were assuming that if the Fallata were to win the war they would lay claim to a certain

area occupied by the Salamat, because they had been using its water resources for centuries. Being assured that this was not the case, the misunderstanding was cleared up and, the Habbaniya leaders were left relieved and satisfied. Both parties promised to comply with the women's plan on peace.

The subsequent peace conference planned by the Habbaniya was held on the 23rd of September in Buram. The Habbaniya commissioners, together with the Fallata and in coordination with the traditional administration and the executive authorities, were able to bring the tribal conflict to an end based on the terms of the Habbaniya and the Fallata. The Salamat did not agree with some of the terms of reconciliation, but they agreed reluctantly to sign in order to stop the war and to normalize peaceful co-existence.

