

# **THE SUDAN YOUTH DIALOGUE**

*Mobilizing Young People to Shape Their Future*



*“The formation of youth groups is important in order to build peace in communities.”  
-Sudanese Youth Delegate*

**LAIKIPIA, KENYA  
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## **I. MISSION**

Young people in Sudan have a vital role to play in determining their future. This dialogue is designed to support young leaders in Sudan so they can help shape the vision and future of their communities.

The Sudan Youth Dialogue (SYD) will bring together young people, ages 20-35, from throughout the Sudan to engage in a weeklong discussion on the role of youth in supporting development initiatives that rebuild areas devastated by conflict, as well as sustaining natural resources and building human and inter-community relations.

During this dialogue, young professionals and students from the Sudan will discuss their most urgent regional needs, share their experiences in community building, and explore youth-led projects that promote youth leadership and community involvement. The young leaders of this Dialogue will come together with the goal of identifying their peers who are committed to shaping a future that can be realized by their generation. The Dialogue will launch a youth forum, whose primary goals are to maintain a channel for positive communication among Sudanese youth by building a permanent youth network, and providing a platform for young Sudanese to address youth challenges through open dialogue in a safe space.

Young people have been particularly affected by the conflict that has befallen Sudan. There are many young refugees, former child soldiers and internally displaced as a result of the North-South conflict. Similarly, the situation in Darfur has subjected many young people to great trauma.

This dialogue is designed to build understanding among young Sudanese of what their counterparts in different parts of the country have endured and continue to experience due to conflict circumstances. To support this effort, several young international leaders (from areas of conflict and post-conflict and committed to non-violence) have expressed great interest in participating as observers. This international delegation will be able to relate to the Sudanese youth by sharing stories of similar experiences and offer recommendations on how youth in their countries constructively and peacefully deal with their challenges.

This international delegation is supported by the Young Leaders Peace Council, which was established at the second Pan-African Youth Leadership Summit held in Ifrane, Morocco in August 2005 in collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme. Their participation is contingent on their commitment to bring home to their communities, upon their return, greater awareness of the current situation in Sudan, and efforts and methods put forth by young Sudanese to build better understanding among their communities based on universal principles and human values.

## **II. WHY A YOUTH DIALOGUE?**

The idea for The Sudan Youth Dialogue (SYD) emerged from the Pan-African Youth Leadership Summit that was held in Dakar, Senegal in June 2004. This Summit was organized jointly by the United Nations, the government of Senegal and the Global Peace Initiative of Women (GPIW), an international non-governmental organization. A young woman from the Sudan who participated in the Pan-African Summit was invited to Jordan some months later to attend a reconciliation conference of Israeli and Palestinian women organized by GPIW. As a result of her participation in this conference, she was inspired to discuss with her peers at home the idea of organizing a similar event in Sudan – only focusing on young people, rather than women. Thus the idea for the Sudan Youth Dialogue was born.

Subsequently, this youth delegate attended the second Pan-African Youth Leadership Summit, held in Ifrane, Morocco in August 2005. There, along with two other delegates from Sudan, she presented her idea for a Sudan Youth Dialogue to the audience of African youth, asking for their support and participation. The Sudanese delegates spoke in depth about the displacements caused by the conflicts between North and South, and in the Western region of Darfur. They explained that as internally displaced peoples migrated, bringing their own values and cultures to new areas, clashes emerged, in addition to already existing tensions, caused by historical issues and development needs. The newly formed Young Leaders Peace Council committed to working with the delegation from Sudan to create a dialogue for Sudanese youth.

Despite the challenges youth in Sudan face, these delegates remain hopeful for their generation. They claim that youth do not always feel as strongly those differences that divide and are able bond with other young people. They also expressed a strong need to reach out to and dialogue with other young people so that youth will not become fuel for future wars –as instigators, soldiers or victims. “Women and young people are very important in building peace in their communities,” said one of the delegates from Sudan.

## **III. FRAMEWORK**

*“In Sudan, the issue of identity is in question. We have a lot of identities – Arab, African, Christian and Muslim – a lot of differences.”*

*– Sudan Youth Delegate*

### **A. Sudan Youth Dialogue & Millennium Development Goals**

The United Nations Millennium Development Goals will be used as a framework for the Dialogue. The SYD program will address three specific development themes: gender equity, environmental sustainability, and poverty reduction. The youth will be asked to explore the possibility of achieving these goals using community cooperation and dialogue with the notion that peace can be an enabling environment for effective sustainable development.

The young leaders from Sudan expressed the view that young people are better able, than people in other age categories, to tap their commonalities and find points that bring them together. Therefore, establishing a permanent network of youth who share similar development and community building goals will be a central theme to this youth dialogue. Thus, the Dialogue will be structured to meet four objectives:

- To cultivate understanding and compassion for what people from different ethnic or religious groups, or regions, have experienced as a result of the conflict;
- To build a culture of mutual respect and a commitment to pluralism, giving equal value to all peoples;
- Promote gender equity among the next generation;
- Develop joint environmental projects, such as reforestation, land and agricultural rehabilitation.

*Cultivating Understanding and Compassion* – the first step in any community building effort is creating the space for a listening process, where all sides can come together in a neutral setting to share their experiences. This process builds bonds that eventually overshadow and heal the distrust, fear, anger and hurt that existed. The Dialogue seeks to create such a neutral space. To achieve this, a steering committee of young African leaders, a select group from the Young Leaders Peace Council, will work with the youth leaders from Sudan to ensure a fair and balanced setting. The first day of the Dialogue meetings will be set aside for such a listening process, where each delegate from Sudan will get an opportunity to share his/her experiences. They will also have the opportunity to listen to the experiences of young people from other nations of conflict that have already embarked on healing, including Lebanon, South Africa, Nigeria, Israel-Palestine, etc.

Special training in communication and mediation skills will be provided during this portion of the Dialogue, and young people will be encouraged to develop workshops in their communities that can build greater understanding of the dialogue process.

*Building a Culture of Mutual Respect* – the natural outcome of such listening is the development of greater respect and caring for the “other.” But this sentiment needs to be developed through ongoing activities. The Dialogue will focus on creating projects to build goodwill and collaboration among young people. Possible projects could include:

- The *Sudan Sustainable Development Project*, an environmental project to build a facility that can host the second phase of the Sudan Youth Dialogue, which can later be used a community or youth meeting space.
- *Environmental Action-Sudan*, increasing environmental awareness through a tree planting and education campaign.
- *Sudan Connect*, a technology project that will build an on-line forum for young people to exchange views.

*“There has been a lot of displacement, and this has caused a family breakdown, which is the strongest impact of the war. This automatically leads to other unpredictable problems like the breakdown of the social web, the breakdown of educational institutions and healthcare.”*

*–Sudan Youth Delegate*

Empowerment of Women – studies have shown that women have great capacity to lead healing efforts because of their ability to tap their emotions, work in teambuilding and non-hierarchical structures, and because most often it is women and children who suffer greatest during conflict. They often have the most at stake.

Since this concept was first proposed by a young woman delegate from Sudan to the Pan-African Youth Leadership Summit, we propose that two women, one from the north and one from the south assume leadership of this effort. Their work will help bring about the empowerment of women in their communities, for they will be demonstrating, not just discussing, the role women can play in building the future of Sudan. The leadership of women in this initiative is most important, as it is this next generation of young men and women from Sudan who together will determine the position of women in their communities.

The Sudan Youth Dialogue (SYD) is being initiated on the premise that the success of the dialogue is contingent on the support of women in Sudanese communities. Thus, the SYD seeks partnership with women groups and/or individuals doing significant work to advance women’s visibility and participation in Sudanese society.

Land Rehabilitation – Land, the physical place where war and conflict transpires, often goes neglected, and is another victim of conflict. In an attempt to begin the process of healing amongst the youth population of Sudan, this Dialogue aims open discussion around restoring parts of the environment in order to recreate a place where positive and peaceful exchanges can occur.

The *Sudan Sustainable Development Project* is one such goal. In recent consultations with the Sudanese youth co-chairs of this Dialogue, it has been determined that building a “hut village” using the traditional mechanisms and materials found in Sudan would be a sustainable way to positively contribute to an area lacking in infrastructure as a result of conflict. The “SYD hut village” would be built primarily as a resource space to house the second Sudan Youth Dialogue, and later transferred to an NGO or youth group in the local community. The goal is to help weave the idea of community participation back into the fabric of society. Creating a physical space dedicated to peaceful dialogue also helps to strengthen a post-conflict culture.

The *Environmental Action-Sudan* project would have similar effects. Bringing people together around a community project, such as tree planting, helps to cultivate dialogue spaces and community cooperation. There is great potential in Sudan to transcend ethnic

and religious division through development activities. Bringing young people together committed to rehabilitating the land could be the future of this youth network.

Peace is vital to social and economic stability. These factors, however, must be supported by development. Without the land there is little hope for self-reliance in Sudan. Creating environmentally themed projects will help to renew, in the Sudanese context, the traditional values many Africans have for their natural environment. Through such cooperatives, the Dialogue will establish a bridge toward peace through community interaction. Supporting the bond between Sudanese youth and the land can help to stem the wave of violence. Young people leading an effort to restore the land as their means of survival would become a deterrent to destroying areas that are cultivated jointly as a community.

## **B. Cultivating Leadership**

*“It is harder to sustain peace than to fight wars. It is easy to destroy but hard to build.”  
– Sudan Youth Delegate*

A main function of the Sudan Youth Dialogue is to encourage leadership development among young people in Sudan, by supporting local and national efforts to bring young people together into a long-term conversation about the future of youth in their communities. A Sudan Youth Steering Committee will be established, composed of the youth delegates from Sudan who participated in the second Pan-African Youth Leadership Summit. These young regional leaders, selected by their peers, have been chosen for their leadership capability and have already demonstrated an ability to articulate the needs of their community and a vision for moving forward in addressing development challenges.

About the SYD Co-Chairs & Steering Committee:

Amel Al-Dehaib – Ms. Al-Dehaib was selected by the United Nations Development Program in Sudan to represent young women leaders of her country at three consecutive UN youth leadership and MDG summits. In October 2006, she attended the UN Global Youth Leadership Summit at the UN Headquarters in New York as the official UN delegate from Sudan. Ms. Al-Dehaib received her post-graduate degree in Development Studies from the University of Khartoum. She is currently a Programme Officer at OXFAM Canada in Khartoum where she manages the Horn of Africa Capacity Building Programme in Sudan. Previously Amel was a Gender and Development Consultant at SOS SAHEL International (UK), where she was responsible for building gender awareness among the staff and community by facilitating sessions on various gender issues. Amel has been a member of the Sudan Environment Conservation Society since 1996, as well the Sudanese Women Empowerment for Peace and the Youth & UN Millennium Development Goals forum.

Mr. Abu Sufian Elbanan Taj Elasia – Mr. Elasia was selected by the United Nations Development Program in Sudan to represent young leaders of his country at two consecutive UN youth leadership and MDG summits. In October 2006, he attended the UN Global Youth Leadership Summit at the UN Headquarters in New York as the official UN delegate from Sudan. Mr. Elasia holds a B.S.c in veterinary medicine and surgery from the Sudan University. He is a member of the Community Development Society in the Darfur region of Sudan. Recently Abu Sufian joined the youth MDG network in Sudan that was

initiated by Ms. Amel Al-Dehaib. He now works to enlighten other active youth in Darfur about the UN Millennium Development Goals, and how they can help to achieve the goals.

Ms. Achan Malual – Ms. Malual graduated from the faculty of medicine at Baher Elgazal University in 2006 and currently works as a medical doctor at Khartoum Hospital in the maternal health department. Ms. Malual has also received training courses on gender, human rights, violence against women and facilitation skills. Currently, she is an executive committee member of the Sudanese Change Maker youth group and is responsible for youth mobilization and information. During her last year of secondary school, she began volunteering with women self-help groups, where she assisted many poor women to build their income generating skills. While a student in the Baher Elgazal University, Ms. Malual jointly started Save International and a peer-to-peer education program on HIV/AIDS and reproductive health; she still remains an active facilitator. Ms. Malual also volunteers at a local health clinic in the vocational training center for youth in displaced camps in Khartoum. Ms. Malual is very connected with people in rural areas, and has done a lot of work both in the South and North Sudan rural areas.

### **C. Dialogue Participants**

*“There is great potential in youth, but they don’t have the chance to dialogue. Always, peace talks are for the adults, and the males.”*

*– Sudan Youth Delegate*

On the recommendation of youth delegates in Sudan, the dialogue should engage youth 20-35 years of age. These experts estimate this age group would be most effective in maintaining the youth network because of experience in their field of study or work, and access to technology to facilitate communication efforts. The SYD will comprise a permanent network of youth representing the following fields: education, science/technology, government, spirituality/religion, sports, art/culture, agriculture and the environment.

The dialogue will include young people from varying social, religious, gender, cultural and age demographics in an effort to represent the diversity within the country. Outreach is taking place in:

- South Sudan (Malakal, Juba and Wau)
- West Sudan (Nyala, Darfur and Kordofan)
- East Sudan (Kassala and Gadarif)
- North Sudan (Khartoum, Port Sudan)

### **IV. SYD STRUCTURE**

The Sudan Youth Dialogue will take place in two parts: SYD Consultation and the launch of the SYD.

The first meeting will be held in March 2007 as a consultation with the SYD co-chairs and approximately 35 key youth representatives who have emerged as leaders representing the Central, Southern, Western, Northern and Eastern regions of the country. As the planning process of the March gathering is implemented, their responsibility will be to mobilize

other young people from their region to participate in the main SYD meeting held later in the year or in early 2008.

The March gathering is vital to the breadth and success of the Sudan youth network because these leaders will agree to the overall structure and implementation of follow-up projects, as well as create the guidelines each co-chair must follow to ensure transparent selection of other youth network participants. This will be a powerful stage in the SYD process because young people are being consulted and administering the dialogue structure. Sudanese youth who share a vision for Sudan will be entrusted with the responsibility of selecting their peers to join them in this community dialogue and development effort.

The March meeting will be held in Kenya at the Gallmann Memorial Ranch & Africa Conservancy, which has donated its facility. The ranch is an environmental and animal preserve where the young leaders will have an opportunity to take part in a healing retreat, where deeper contemplation and reflection on their goals and future aspirations for the Sudan youth network can take place.

### **SYD Organizers**

*“There is a lot of work to be done on the ground.”*

*– Sudan Youth Delegate*

The Sudan Youth Dialogue (SYD) is an outcome of a series of youth leadership summits on the UN Millennium Development Goals organized by the United Nations and the Global Peace Initiative of Women (GPIW).

The SYD will be organized under the auspices of the Young Leaders Peace Council, which was established at the Pan-African Youth Leadership Summit II in Ifrane, Morocco in 2005. The Peace Council is an organized body of young leaders who aim to play an active role in transforming conflict, promoting healing and reconciliation, and in addressing the causes that lead to violence. It aims to create a forum of young leaders working together to build a new culture for development and peace. Under the guidance of a local Sudanese steering committee and the Peace Council, the SYD leadership seeks to create a development project that can be implemented locally.

The SYD will receive support from the Global Peace Initiative of Women. The US Institute for Peace and the United Nations University for Peace have expressed interest in providing skills training and facilitation resources. Dharma Drum Mountain Buddhist Association, an international Buddhist organization that supports initiatives to cultivate the development of young leaders engaged in community building activities, is the main sponsor for this dialogue.