



SUCCESS STORY

Equestrian Festival a Conduit for Peace Building in Darfur



USAID/OTI/SUDAN

The winner of a horse race at the USAID/OTI-supported equestrian festival in South Darfur celebrates among fellow Darfurians.

By reviving the traditional equestrian festival in Ad Du`ayn, the Southern Rizeigat tribe is sowing the seeds of peace in Sudan.

May 2007 – The conflict in Darfur has continued for nearly five years, and both Arab and non-Arab tribes have aligned with the government to fight opposition forces. The hostilities have spawned murder, rape, and the razing of villages. And in this respect, the conflict is not merely tribal; it is a war on the fabric of Sudan’s society.

Recognizing this, the leaders of one Arab tribe, the Southern Rizeigat, have made a deliberate decision to remain neutral. To help the Southern Rizeigat maintain their nonaligned stance and serve as a model for others, USAID’s Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI) provided support for the tribe’s equestrian festival in Ad Du`ayn. Such festivals have historically provided a neutral setting where tribes could socialize, engage in friendly competitions, and discuss difficult issues. By all accounts, the festival – which brought together the Southern Rizeigat, citizens from neighboring communities, and Arab and non-Arab tribes from South Darfur – was the first such event since 1971.

In addition to the main event of horse racing, the festival featured nationally known singers, academics, poets, and comedians, all of whom emphasized the benefits of unity, cultural diversity, and peace. The activities reminded the participants of a time when conflict was less pervasive and regional centers like Ad Du`ayn, which is hundreds of miles from Khartoum, had a more prominent role in people’s lives. Participants from a nomadic tribe were overhead asking, “What have we been fighting for?” And according to an observer, the event “shocked people out of conflict mode.”

The festival’s organizers noted that the event was helping to establish a new vision of cooperation, which contrasts with recent public rallies where extreme political ideologies have been front and center. Young leaders who had not been involved in the hostilities were given a chance to direct the event and remind the people of Ad Du`ayn that the benefits of peace far outweigh any gains derived from conflict.