

Sudanese in Australia celebrate

By Mathew Albert

Despite the vast oceans that separate Sudan from Australia, many Australians have joined the global community in celebrating the recent developments towards peace in Sudan.

Some may be surprised that the level of interest is so high in such a far-off place. The attention Sudan receives in Australia is easily explained.

The Sudanese community is the fastest growing ethnic community in the multicultural tapestry that makes up Australian society.

At present there are approximately 8,000 Sudanese people living in Australia, many as Australian citizens. Most of these people have come to Australia on "humanitarian visas".

They are supported by the Australian Government on their arrival with education, finance and housing.

The domino effect of this growing and new community is that more and more Australians are coming into contact with and learning about the vibrancy of the Sudanese Diaspora.

In 2000 as a response to the growth of the Sudanese community in Australia, an organization was born, called the Sudanese Australian Integrated Learning Programme (but better known as the SAIL Programme), the organization provides free English support and community services to the Sudanese community in and around Melbourne, Australia's second largest city.

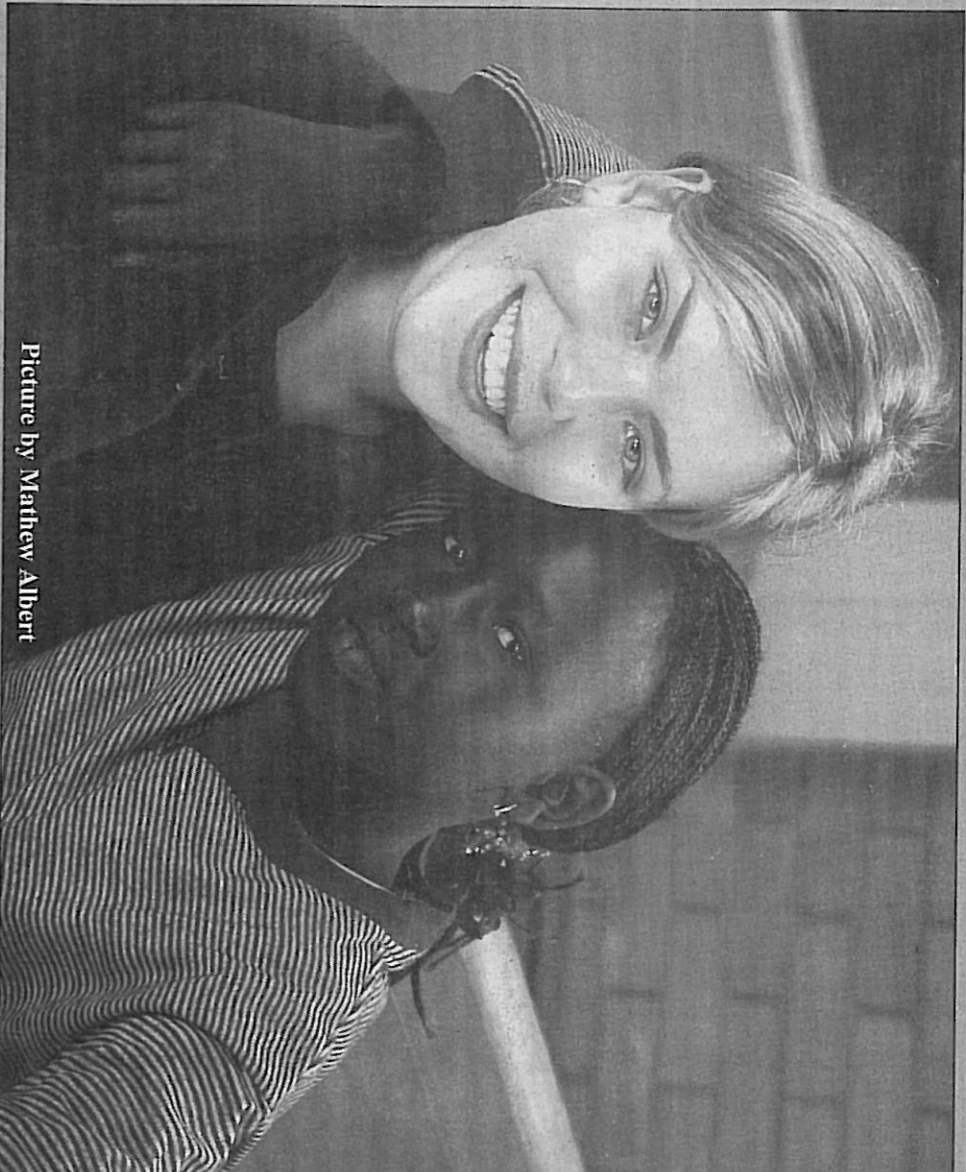
The SAIL Programme is volunteer-run and remains strictly secular. It aims to assist Sudanese people to come to grips with their new (and perhaps temporary) home, Australia.

Each week approximately 350 Sudanese of all ages and a similar number of non-Sudanese gather in various venues across Melbourne to share stories and experiences.

Although it is known as an English learning centre, it is in many ways a specialized school for Sudanese studies.

It provides fallow ground for the growth of relationships which "spread the word" about Sudan, its blessings and its burdens.

Until recently however the level of interest in Sudan and its people has outstripped the amount of



Picture by Mathew Albert

Making friends: A Sudanese girl shares a happy moment with her Australian friend in Melbourne.



File Picture

Sudanese dress up for a traditional dance at the peace talks venue in Naivasha, Kenya.

information available to Australians about it.

The Sudanese community and

its supporters saw this gap in information about the Sudanese Diaspora. To this end, the Sudanese Online Research Association (SORA) was created. SORA is an online hub for all things that will inform service pro-

viders to the Sudanese Diaspora. It is also a centre for Sudanese Diaspora-related research.

This online research library now bolsters the information available to people who are interested in Sudan and its people.

So what do Australians think of their Sudanese siblings in Australia?

In a nation proud of its multicultural history, the Australian population is admiring of and inspired by the Sudanese community.

The reason is simple. Sudanese people in Australia prove that sustainable peace is born as much between individuals as it is between top-level negotiators.

Members of the Australian Sudanese community are willing and wanting to work alongside members of other Sudanese communities.

Every week at the SAIL Programme, Northern Sudanese work with Southern Sudanese, Christians join with Muslims, Dinka with Nuer and so on.

Indeed the SAIL Programme involves representatives of almost every tribe and region in Sudan. Never once has this triggered tension.

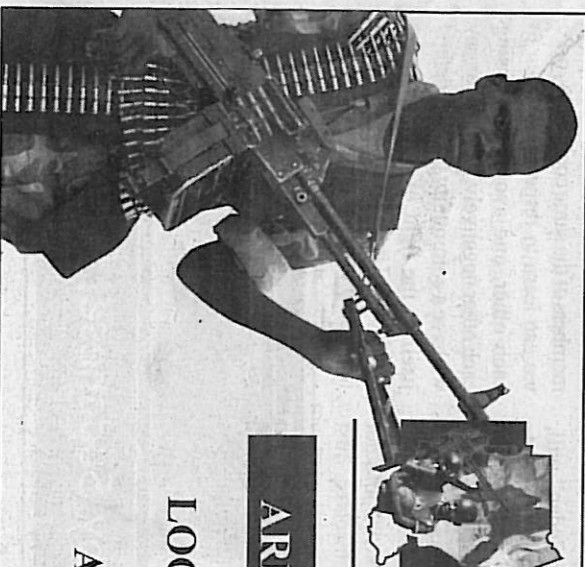
For non-Sudanese observers, it is a study in grass-roots reconciliation. For Sudanese it is surely a sign that living together in sustainable peace is not only possible but desirable.

In some ways the SAIL Programme experience is a model in peace studies for Sudan. The Sudanese Australian give weight to the idea that 'peace begins with you'. Australia and Australians, including naturalized Sudanese, are investors in the peaceful future of Sudan.

We join our friends across the world and throughout the Sudanese Diaspora in supporting every genuine effort towards peace in Sudan.

It remains our hope that those negotiating and bringing peace to Sudan will bear in mind that there are now Sudanese people around the globe gaining skills, knowledge and awareness that they hope, in the near future, to be able to offer back to their homeland.

In the meantime, Sudan's unofficial ambassadors would make any person from Sudan justifiably proud.



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