

# NEWS IN DARFUR:



**THE ONLY  
INDEPENDENT  
NEWS IN  
DARFUR:**

**RADIO  
DABANGA.**



**The news media in Sudan is state-controlled and heavily restricted. Years of war and crisis have made the gathering of news impossible. Against all odds, Radio Dabanga has remained on air for five years.**

**Independent news for Darfur  
has a name:  
Radio Dabanga**

# Empowering Darfur

Sudan, and the Darfur region in particular, has been ravaged by more than 10 years of armed conflict. Friction between the Khartoum government, its loyal militias, and a complex array of armed rebel groups and factions has escalated. And as always in any conflict, most victims have been ordinary people.

‘Information is power’, and in an environment like Darfur, where the security or political climate is highly changeable, access to reliable, accurate news and information are essential to millions of people’s very survival – whether the information relates to criminal activity, seasonal floods or new conflict zones that need to be avoided.

However the media in Sudan is highly restricted. Television and radio stations are government owned, while the press is marked by government scrutiny, censorship, and frequent banning and seizures by the security apparatus. Courageous, dedicated journalists and correspondents routinely face harassment and arrest. They put their lives at risk to provide their fellow Darfuris with a steady flow of reliable news.

Radio Dabanga was set up as a network of visionary Sudanese journalists, supported by international development organisations, local NGOs, and the Dutch awareness campaign ‘Tot Zover Darfur’. The station is operated and facilitated by the media development organisation Free Press Unlimited.

In the five years since it first went on air on 15 November 2008, Radio Dabanga has built a reputation and earned acclaim as the only reliable news source in the region. In the spirit of the watchword ‘People deserve to know’, Radio Dabanga’s committed team strive to provide Darfuris in Sudan and abroad, NGOs operating in the region, and the international community with even-handed and comprehensive coverage and reports. The fact is that for many people in Darfur, access to accurate information is literally a matter of life and death.



**Hadeya Abdalrahman  
Adoum**  
Kaka camp, Chad

**“Radio Dabanga is very important to us because its broadcasts cover everything about problems in Darfur, camps for the displaced as well as refugee camps. We can easily contact them with our problems.”**

**Ahmed Eshak Madini**  
State Minister of Health,  
West Darfur

**“I found what I was missing in Radio Dabanga. No other radio station is aimed at people in remote areas. Radio Dabanga reflects what is happening in every corner of Darfur. It is the only and the main source of information so people are very keen to listen to it.”**

**"Radio Dabanga represents  
a certain counter-balance;  
nobody is going to  
intimidate them, nobody  
is going to tell them what  
they have to say."**

**Prof Eric Reeves**

Renowned Sudan researcher and analyst

خدمتاء دارفور  
من دارفور

**Darfur**  
**calling**

**Undercover reporters as well as Darfuri listeners contact our central desk.**

**They call about a donkey that has gone missing; they call to restore contact with relatives; they call because they saw their village burn to ashes.**

**So when it's Darfur on the line, Radio Dabanga takes the call.**



# Rolling the world, carefully

For many people in Darfur, listening to news broadcasts by Radio Dabanga has become something of a daily ritual. This is true for three million people internally displaced by 10 years of conflict, as well as the 400,000 Darfuris who populate refugee camps in neighbouring Chad.

The *dabanga* is one of the most important items, and a focal point in a Darfuri family's home. It is a large terracotta pot that holds the family's food reserves or other valuables.

Just as important is their radio, a vital source of news and information. While living in abject poverty, refugees and displaced people will treasure their radio, even when there is not enough grain in the *dabanga* to feed them.

A *dabanga* is very heavy and cannot easily be moved. The only way to transport it is to gently roll it on its side, as it tends to break, hence the Arabic proverb:

دنیا دبنقا در دقي بشيش

(the world is like a *dabanga*, roll it carefully), implying that sometimes, delicacy and patience are needed to solve problems.

From its first broadcasts in 2008, Radio Dabanga's audience quickly grew to exceed two million in less than a year. Radio Dabanga's listenership grew from 28 per cent of the population of Darfur in January 2010 to 58 per cent in December 2012.

Radio Dabanga is the people's radio station, so apart from vital news, broadcasts also cover a multitude of matters of public concern. These include social issues, such as education-related matters, like the scarcity of teachers and resources, as well as breaking the taboos around the countless cases of sexual assault and rape.

Other organisations and media are fearful of broaching these subjects, as they risk government censure or expulsion. Radio Dabanga sends a clear message to Darfuris that their daily concerns are being acknowledged and validated. This close connection with listeners has earned their trust, so when an incident occurs, it is often said in Darfur that it's better to call Radio Dabanga than the police.



**Mohamed Makky**  
Education Supervisor  
Kaka camp, Chad

**"We feel like radio Dabanga is ours, because it expresses our problems and is easy to understand, regardless your level of education. It also keeps us updated about the situation back home – when we listen to Radio Dabanga, we feel like we are home."**

Coordinator of  
displaced women  
in Zalingei camp,  
Darfur

**"Radio Dabanga makes it possible for us to talk about the problems of rape, reproductive health, and nutrition. They focus on women's issues, women during pregnancy, children, as well as the elderly. They cover the search for solutions and treatment. They deliver our messages and our complaints."**

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**While circumstances can be extremely difficult Radio Dabanga insists on quality journalism. Our sources are often dedicated amateurs, working in dangerous conditions. The professional editorial team verify the facts, and cross-check sources. They leave no gaps in the story.**

**We get the facts tuned-in before we go on air.**

# Speaking the people's language

Radio Dabanga is compiled and edited by Darfuris for Darfuris. The editorial team hail from across the region, so they combine professional journalism with detailed local knowledge – essential when preparing bulletins on which their listeners might base life-or-death decisions.

From the outset, it was the intention of Radio Dabanga to speak to the people of Darfur in their own language. Five years on, programmes are still mainly broadcast in Darfur Arabic, but news bulletins are also translated into the main vernacular languages of Standard Arabic, Fur, Masalit, Zaghawa, Iringa and Meidob.

The format of programmes varies from news bulletins to interviews, as well as discussion and features. Content includes anything from current affairs to matters of justice and health, but also personal greetings from listeners to friends. Often, Radio Dabanga broadcasts details of people, displaced throughout Darfur, desperate to find their spouses, children, or parents.

Over the course of five years, Radio Dabanga's news coverage has slowly been extended to cover conflict areas in the rest of Sudan. It has become an essential source, not only for people in Darfur and Sudan, but also for the international community, as the independent international media are not allowed access to Darfur. Alas, many news channels have simply abandoned Darfur for other hotspots in the world that are more accessible.

For Darfuris abroad, selected items are posted daily on the Radio Dabanga website. The latest broadcasts can be downloaded and selected news items are available in English and Arabic on [www.radiodabanga.org](http://www.radiodabanga.org)



**Yassin Yahya  
Abdalkarim**  
Kaka camp, Chad

**"Radio Dabanga is the radio of marginalised people who have been suffering for a long time. Their lives are full of sadness and misery without much joy and happiness."**

Resident of  
Kalma camp, Darfur

**"We feel we will die if we do not listen to Radio Dabanga for a day. Radio Dabanga brings us freedom. The language Radio Dabanga uses is understandable to all people without translation or explanation. Radio Dabanga has allowed us to find brothers and sisters who we lost contact with for several years. I wish Radio Dabanga would extend broadcasting time and broadcast even more news."**

**KH30**

**M550**

**71A**

**05Z:**

**07:30**  
**15550**

**AM**  
**KHZ**

**The Sudanese government routinely tries to jam Radio Dabanga's programmes. As always, we have learned to work around these restrictions. This way we can continue to deliver the news to the people in Darfur and further afield.**

**Every day from 7:30 to 9:00 am  
and from 6:30 to 7:30 pm**

# Weathering the storm

When Radio Dabanga went on air in 2008, the government had reduced its attacks on civilian targets, the humanitarian support for millions of displaced people showed progress, and peace negotiations were underway between North and South Sudan. Journalists had some freedom to work.

In the five years that followed, Radio Dabanga covered a situation that changed dramatically. Radio Dabanga steadily extended its network of local reporters, stringers, and correspondents on the ground. The security situation in Darfur deteriorated alarmingly.

When the International Criminal Court (ICC) in The Hague issued an arrest warrant for Sudan's President Omar Al Bashir for five counts 'Crimes against Humanity', it had far-reaching effects on the people of Darfur, as well as Radio Dabanga. In March 2009, Al Bashir expelled 13 aid organisations from Darfur, while other NGOs had to downsize or suspend operations. Radio Dabanga was now the only remaining voice reporting on sexual violence, illegal arrests, detentions, and land seizure in Darfur. When the ICC added 'Genocide' to Al Bashir's Charge Sheet in 2010, it further curtailed his movement and led to several international embarrassments, raising tensions even further.

In September 2011, Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) leader Khalil Ibrahim was killed in an air strike in North Kordofan. In his last interview – just days before his

death – he told Radio Dabanga of the aircraft circling above him, that he had to keep moving for fear of his life. Radio Dabanga was the first to break the news of Ibrahim's death to a shocked Darfur and the world.

In 2012 the Sudanese Armed Forces resumed the 'military solution' by targeting markets and villages in Central Darfur. The independence of South Sudan resulted in several border wars and led to the cutting off of oil production. The economy of Sudan collapsed even further and international aid was fiercely curtailed.

In January 2013, tribal clashes between government-supported militias over control of the Jebel 'Amer gold mines left an estimated 100,000 families displaced, 260 people dead and 150 villages destroyed. But apart from occasional reports from news agencies, the daily coverage of the crisis was provided by Radio Dabanga.

In September 2013, protests erupted in cities across Sudan against soaring prices following the government's lifting of fuel subsidies. When government forces used tear gas and live ammunition against protesters, 200 people died. Khartoum imposed a countrywide gag on all media, Radio Dabanga was the only channel focusing international attention on the protests to the world.



**Aicha Elbasri**  
former spokesperson  
for Unamid

**"Many Khartoum-based international media rely on Radio Dabanga for major stories. With the government routinely denying independent media access to Darfur, and the Sudan-based media subject to censorship or self-censorship, Radio Dabanga has become the main media outlet providing uncensored information."**



**Fatema Gomah Adam**  
Kaka camp, Chad

**"I once called Radio Dabanga to talk about the food situation in the camps. They said that it helps to let people know about these things. I told them that there was not enough food. After this, we got a little more. But now we have less food again. So we need to keep bringing this issue up on the radio."**



○ **Darfur**



○ Darfur

**News for Darfur is gathered in Darfur but compiled and broadcast by Darfuri editors abroad.**

**The central desk of Radio Dabanga is located in Amsterdam, making the city the news hub of Darfur.**

**Darfur is not just a faraway place on a map.**

**Darfur is also in Amsterdam.**

# A wide net

Covering more than 493,000 square kilometres, Darfur is comparable to the size of Spain. It has an estimated population of over six million; however the ravages of a decade of armed conflict have left deep scars.

The numbers are staggering, but reliable UN estimates count the newly-displaced for the first half of 2013 alone at more than 300,000. Thousands more have fled to the vast refugee camps in neighbouring Chad. A few have sought refuge further afield, joining a growing Sudanese diaspora in Europe, the USA, and elsewhere in Africa. After 10 years of conflict, delivering Darfur news to Darfuris around the world involves far more than beaming to Darfur alone. Daily updated online content is therefore as important as the shortwave broadcasts.

Radio Dabanga draws on sources from the length and breadth of Darfur. From El Fasher to Nyala; from El Geneina to Zalingei, Radio Dabanga also covers every camp, village, and farm in-between. It fills in what much of the world sees as blank spaces on the vast map, giving Darfuris a voice in the world, and the world a window on Darfur.

Radio Dabanga's central desk is based in Amsterdam. However, thanks to modern technology, the 9,200 kilometres to Darfur feels like 'just around the corner'.

Today, in order to provide independent, up-to-date, and reliable news to such a diverse and widespread audience, Radio Dabanga utilises several channels. Shortwave transmissions reach three million people daily. The latest news broadcasts can also be downloaded from [www.radiodabanga.org](http://www.radiodabanga.org)

Serving the Darfuri diaspora and the international community at large, the English and Arabic web content of Radio Dabanga is also acknowledged and lauded by researchers as 'a resource database on Darfur'.



**Nouralsham  
Hasaballah Oshar**  
Kaka camp, Chad

**"Peace is not going to be achieved by signing an agreement. People just talk about peace. There is no peace at all. Peace can only be achieved when the perpetrators are held accountable. Peace while Al Bashir and his friends are in charge of the state is not peace. All I hope for is peace on the ground so that people can go home safely."**

**Sean Brooks**  
Office of the US Special  
Envoy to Sudan  
(2010 - 2012)

**"Over the past years I have seen Radio Dabanga become a primary source of information for the rest of the 'policy community' as the attention has waned from the mainstream media. Based on its model, Radio Dabanga is now one of the very few institutions with people on the ground."**

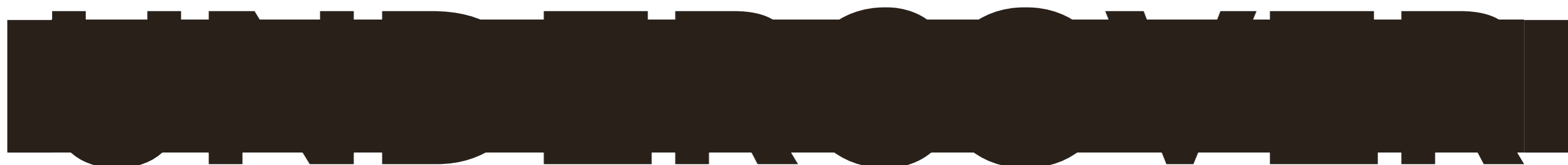
**"The editors of Radio Dabanga have made personal sacrifices, but these sacrifices are small compared to the hardships people in Darfur have to endure every day. The reward is seeing the difference that Radio Dabanga can make in people's lives. That's why we have to carry on – because giving up is not an option."**

**Kamal Elsadig**

Editor-in-Chief, Radio Dabanga



# FULL MEDIA COVERAGE



**FULL MEDIA  
COVERAGE BY  
UNDERCOVER  
JOURNALISTS**

**There are no well-equipped camera crews in Sudan. Correspondents from international TV stations and newspapers left years ago. But for the people of Darfur, news is necessary for their very survival. To reach-out to the world.**

**Radio Dabanga isn't only crucial to Darfuris;  
It's the voice of Darfur to the world.**

# Keeping watch

It is especially true in times of crisis or conflict; people require reliable information to make what are often life-or-death decisions. Also, as has been the case since the invention of newspapers, there is little doubt that the news media of today will be the primary source for the historians of tomorrow.

Looking through Radio Dabanga's online news archive of the past five years, the recent history of Darfur reads like a litany of human suffering. Following events 'on the ground' as they unfold, Radio Dabanga is important to the Darfur of today, while preserving an important record for the future.

Darfur is by no means the only region in the world plagued by conflict, disease, famine, and strife. It is important, however, that the cries for help from Darfur not be drowned out by the cacophony of daily reports of human suffering from around the world. With local media seriously constrained and international reporters having fled or been banished from Darfur, that's exactly what is happening.

Radio Dabanga has been a constant independent voice for Darfur, promoting awareness for the plight of Darfuris. Direct appeals via Radio Dabanga by leaders of the displaced often bring issues to the attention of institutions and NGOs. In this way, Radio Dabanga makes a direct contribution to finding solutions, keeping Darfur on the international agenda.

It is important that the myriad crimes and atrocities committed in Darfur today are not forgotten. Radio Dabanga's extensive news archive dating back to 2008 forms an effective and often indicting mirror of the Darfur of the past half-decade – one that will prove invaluable to the researchers, governments, and prosecutors of the future.

**Akshaya Kuma**  
Enough Project

**"We often use reports from Radio Dabanga to task our Satellite Sentinel Project, which leverages satellite technology to independently corroborate information. For example, when Radio Dabanga reports that a certain village has been bombarded, we seek to secure satellite imagery to confirm the reported bombardment. Radio Dabanga is a valuable source of information as we decide where to focus our satellites."**

**Mukesh Kapila**  
former UN Resident  
and Humanitarian  
Coordinator in Sudan

**"Radio Dabanga is a very important source of information and hope, whatever the criticism. Without information, without communication, there is no hope. As long as news trickles out, there is connectivity. And as long as there is connectivity there is a sense of connectedness. And when there is connectedness there is hope for the future in the sense of stability and peace. It is not just how you cover it – it is the fact that there is coverage going on. That has an impact."**



**DARFUR**

**DARFUR**  
**ON AIR**

**Radio Dabanga is not just a radio station. It's a channel for Darfuris to communicate with each other; aspects that are crucial and often life-saving to Darfur society. People gather in the morning to listen to Radio Dabanga. It has become an important part of their daily routine.**

**If Radio Dabanga is OFF AIR  
Darfur is OFF AIR**

# Against all odds

Radio Dabanga was initially the brainchild of a coalition of visionary Sudanese journalists. Five years on, primary sources 'on the ground' are still the most important source for Radio Dabanga.

Radio Dabanga's unvarnished and candid reporting has not endeared it to the Sudanese authorities. Much content is delivered at great personal risk to the courageous journalists, stringers, correspondents, and ordinary Darfuris who report daily to the Central News Desk of Radio Dabanga.

But curbs, gags, bans, and censorship have never deterred Radio Dabanga. The station has become adept at working around any attempts at outside interference.

Gagged in their home country, the cream of the Darfuri press corps chose exile over government-enforced silence and compliance. The Netherlands, long renowned for its fierce belief in freedom of speech and independence of the press, was a harbour in the storm.

The Radio Dabanga central desk fields a daily stream of calls from reporters as well as listeners. Reports are then carefully checked before being included in a broadcast. The integrity of news reports is all-important, so in a region often rife with conflicting reports, propaganda, hearsay, and rumour, Radio Dabanga is committed to using the protocols of professional journalism: One side of the story is no story.

As uncertain as the future may be, the intrepid news-gathering team of Radio Dabanga will continue to report news on Darfur, to Darfur, and by Darfuris. People deserve to know.



**Assadig Musa**  
Editor at Radio Dabanga

**"Radio Dabanga is not just a radio station. It has opened a window. It is a way for the people of Darfur to communicate with one another. We think together with them about the challenges in the region, and how to achieve peace in Darfur and all of Sudan.**

**I am sure that one day, everyone in the Darfuri diaspora will be able go back to our beloved country in peace; refugees from Chad, Central African Republic, and South Sudan, and others around the world. It's our aim at Radio Dabanga to offer an opportunity: to contribute to that peace."**



**"Radio Dabanga is for everyone, regardless of age and gender. Radio Dabanga allows us to be together as one."**

Camp Coordinator  
in Zalingei, Darfur

# Colophon

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People deserve to know