



## SUCCESS STORY

### Peace Circles Increase Cross-Cultural Understanding in Schools



*Peace circle students on their way to high school, where they lobbied for new uniforms.*

*USAID/OTI supported the creation of 18 peace circles in high schools throughout Khartoum.*

**August 2007** – The movement of Sudan’s population from the country’s war-torn peripheries to Khartoum has left the city with an extremely diverse population. However, two decades of repressive rule has permeated the culture and curriculum of public schools, embedding attitudes and methods that compound the feelings of alienation and injustice experienced by students from different ethnic and religious backgrounds. In many school districts, students are increasingly segregated, and positive interaction and long-term friendships between students from different groups are rare.

To strengthen the ability of various facets of civil society to advocate for the full implementation of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), which guarantees freedom of association, a concept foreign to many youth in Sudan, USAID’s Office of

Transition Initiatives (OTI) has supported the creation of peace circles in 18 public high schools throughout greater Khartoum. The initiative provided 22 teachers with training on the CPA, conflict resolution, and human rights. Subsequently, the teachers returned to their schools to establish groups comprised of 20 to 25 students from a variety of backgrounds. Over a 2-month period, the students and teachers met twice a week to promote cross-cultural understanding. Interactive sessions were held on the CPA and human rights, and students taught one another about Sudan by sharing their diverse histories and traditions in short presentations. The interactions prompted by the activity dispelled false perceptions of the “other” and inspired the students to act.

Soon after the peace circles were established, the students were focusing on a wider audience, calling for school banners, slogans, and logos to promote messages of peaceful coexistence. Teachers and students also challenged the current glorification of the military, lobbying the government to introduce a peace curriculum into the schools and to replace school uniforms that resemble military fatigues. In addition, special editions of monthly magazines were produced with peace-focused themes. Currently, due to high student demand, activities promoting inclusion and interaction are expanding to other schools.