



**For Immediate Release
May 30, 2012**

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Darfuri Refugees to Compete for First Time at 2012 VIVA World Cup Soccer Tournament

“Now we are part of the world,” says Darfuri Elder and Camp Leader

Refugee Camp Djabal, Eastern Chad (May 24, 2012) — Until several months ago, Darfur didn't even have a soccer team or perhaps even hadn't dreamed of one. Now after weeks of try-outs and training, *Darfur United*, a team comprised solely of Darfur refugees, will compete for the Nelson Mandela Trophy at the 2012 VIVA World Cup in Erbil, Iraqi-Kurdistan, June 5-9.

Many of the young men on *Darfur United* have only played on the desert sand, with bare feet and makeshift balls. On June 5th they will run out into the 28,000 seat Franso Hairi Stadium and play on a real field for the first time, against teams from Monaco, Tamil, Kurdistan, Occitania, Southern Cameroons and other nations.

"The *Darfur United* players have had nothing positive to celebrate and have been losing hope of any future beyond the confines of the refugee camp," says Gabriel Stauring, Director of iACT, which is partnering with Aid Still Required to bring the team to Iraq. "This team means so much more to them than just a game of football. It gives all refugees something to celebrate, and it gives them a connection to the outside world."

Anticipation is growing widely in the Darfur camps in advance of VIVA. Every day refugees line the area where their team practices. One elder, describing the pride permeating the camps, said, "Now we are part of the world."

Souleyman Adam Bourma, a refugee from camp Goz Amer who tried out for *Darfur United*, put it this way: "I am very excited. I cannot express my feelings. We heard about this team six months ago, and today it's truth."

Sponsors and donors include adidas, UNHCR, David Beckman, Los Angeles Galaxy, MLS Works (Major League Soccer Foundation), EVO Soccer Programs and many individuals. "Everyone who hears this story is moved by it," says Hunter Payne, co-founder of Aid Still Required.

Sixty-one players from all twelve refugee camps along the Chad-Sudan border participated in try-outs for sixteen spots on the team roster. "Every single one of our players has the story of

having their village attacked, of seeing family and friends being killed, mothers, sisters being raped in front of them, and then having to walk across the desert to survive and make it to one of these camps,” says Stauring. “They just make balls out of anything - some socks or some rubber that they put together - and they play.”

Darfur United Coach Mark Hodson is both optimistic and realistic. “The level of talent is impressive, especially considering the facilities and resources available to the players. Everyone came ready to play, and they didn't need asking twice to produce their best level of effort.

“For me the greatest prize from this mission will be to see the team step out onto the field wearing their *Darfur United* uniforms. To get 16 refugees from 12 different camps to one location is a feat in and of itself. Those not in the know will never understand how difficult this is to accomplish. From that, the selection and training process has provided moments of joy and euphoria that the team and volunteers will forever share.

“This group of players has suffered incredible sadness and hardship. There is no sign that their situation is going to improve any time soon....but they still carry a tremendous pride and sense of responsibility and a hope, that what they are doing will create a new path and joy for the people of Darfur, and it is an honor to be involved!”

On May 31st, *Darfur United* will travel from Chad to Iraqi Kurdistan for the Cup. Most of the players are in their late teens or early twenties, making them approximately ten years old when they escaped the violence in Darfur. They have spent all of their adult lives as refugees in the desert camps of Chad and all of them have stories of harrowing experiences escaping the attacks that led them to refugee life.

In a few weeks they can put all that behind them, at least for a few days, and represent millions of other refugees in international competition.

Official *Darfur United* Roster:

1. Mahamat Djabir Defallah - Defender
2. Youssef Mohammed Abdala - Center Back
3. Mubarak Haggar Duogom - Striker
4. Abdulbassit Omer Soulyman - Central Midfield/Right Back
5. Sadam Hissen Dine - Left Midfield
6. Mohamed Omer Inagy - Central Midfield
7. Abobaker Zakaria Ali - Midfield
8. Mohamed Adam Abdalah - Midfield
9. Mohamed Mahmoud Anour - Left Back
10. Abdulhamid Mohamed Gum - Goalkeeper
11. Mubarek Khamis Ahmed - Central Defender/Holding Midfield
12. Mubarak Abdelah Ahmed - Right Midfield/Right Forward
13. Saleh Abakar Yaya - Midfield
14. Ismail Garmaradin Abakar - Goalkeeper
15. Souleyman Adam Bourma - Striker
16. Yaya Ramadane Adam - Striker

Darfur United's journey can be followed at:

www.darfurunited.com

www.facebook.com/darfurunited

www.twitter.com/darfurunited

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[Darfur United](#) is an all-refugee soccer team made up of Darfuri refugees living in camps in Eastern Chad. Darfur United is coached by Mark Hodson of Evolution Soccer and Manhattan Beach Sand & Surf Soccer Club.

[i-ACT](#), based in Redondo Beach, California, is the leading organization working on the ground in refugee camps in Eastern Chad, with established relationships and partners since 2005. An expedition team visits the camps twice a year, and maintains internet connectivity and communication year-round. i-ACT is a global team dedicated to putting a face on the numbers of dead, dying, and displaced while creating mutually enriching relationships between those in danger and those willing and able to act, fostering a new culture of participation.

[Aid Still Required](#) (ASR), based in Santa Monica, California, is the leading organization focusing the spotlight on forgotten issues and people who have been left behind after natural disasters and human crises. Aid Still Required's outreach campaigns for Darfur, Haiti, New Orleans and areas affected by the 2004 tsunami have reached over 250 million people. ASR's field projects involve local partners in customized, culturally-appropriate programs to regain self-sufficiency.