



A UN peacekeeper keeps watch in a camp for displaced civilians in Juba, South Sudan.

PHOTO: REUTERS

"Peacekeeping has to adapt to the changing nature of conflict"

Ameerah Haq served as the Under-Secretary General (USG) for the Department of Field Support and was the highest-ranking Bangladeshi in the United Nations during those years. After four decades of heading humanitarian and development missions in Asia and Africa, she retired in 2015. In this conversation with Sarah Nafisa Shahid, exclusively conducted for Star Weekend, Haq shares reflections from her field experiences in post-conflict regions and speaks about the future of the UN's Peacekeeping department.

You worked as Humanitarian Coordinator and the Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General in Sudan when the country was going through one of the worst humanitarian crises with a million people displaced from their homes. What programmes and initiatives did you introduce to tackle such a complex scenario and what changes do you see in Darfur today?

At that time, it was the largest humanitarian programme in the world. The challenge in Darfur was primarily our inability as UN humanitarian workers, to have proper access to the entire population. We had to use what we call our "good offices" to get access to mobility and logistics, including our flights into the region. There were political processes that were being facilitated between the government and rebel groups.

Unfortunately, there is very little that has taken place, in terms of solutions despite many negotiations. The population is still affected, people do not feel safe to return to their homes. In fact, a lot of these camps, which were temporary structures, have almost become peri-urban centres. I went back to Darfur seven or eight years later and I was surprised to see that areas where there were tents had become hard-walled accommodations and within these



Ameerah Haq visits Kabkabiya UNAMID team site

settings, they are getting food aid, education, and health services. Those humanitarian programmes continue but little has improved in the political negotiations.

In Timor-Leste, a new country born out of an independence struggle against Indonesian occupation, you served as the Head of United Nations Integrated Mission. During your tenure, domestic

violence was the dominant civil crime in Timor. What programmes were implemented by the mission to tackle gendered violence? In most post-conflict countries, it is quite common to see domestic violence, primarily targeted against women. A lot of these are part of the phenomenon of men who, having fought for the liberation of the country, do not have gainful employment and are not able to see immediate benefits of independence once the war had ceased. A lot of that frustration was taken out on women. (But I should also add that in Timor, women played an important role in the independence).

The mission in Timor had a very strong policing component which dealt with domestic violence. In fact, the UN had the executive responsibility of policing the country. We requested police contributions from the international community for the mission, with a special emphasis on providing female officers. Those officers created safe spaces in the country where women could go and report about the violence. Safe houses were created where the women could stay temporarily till the problem at home was resolved. We set up community policing so that female police could patrol and establish rapport in order to make the women feel comfortable. In many of the police stations, we had a child-friendly area (supported by UNICEF) at the back, which was painted in bright colours, so that women who came with children, which was a lot of them, did not have to wait in front of the station and could rest in a more welcoming space.

You served as Vice Chair of Ban Ki-Moon's High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations (HIPPO). Why was there a need to review United Nations peace operations?

In the early days of the UN, the role of

peacekeeping was to monitor ceasefires. Over the last few decades, the UN is in places where there is no peace to keep. We are being sent into theatres where war is still being fought. Most of these are *within* countries, such as Darfur and Congo—some of them may have regional dimension to it, but mostly the conflicts are intra-state and not inter-state.

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