

00:03

Hello, I am Makhtoum Abdalla from Sudan, born in 2004, in Nyala, South Darfur. And on the map, the western part of Sudan is where you find Darfur. For over a decade, the state was affected [by] conflict, which we were still reeling from. And as a result, since I was four years old, my family have lived in a camp for internally displaced people: an IDP camp for families that have been driven from their homes for one reason or another, to another part of the country. My family was displaced because of conflict, and I was born in a world full of complexity, loss and deprivation. But despite that, my family and I are still here full of hopes and dreams for a better tomorrow.

00:53

Before the camp, we used to live in a place called Otash village in South Darfur. And as the word “otash” comes from the Arabic word “A’atshan”, which means thirsty. And it has been called so for the lack of water resources in that area. And so the name of our IDP camp is Otash camp. Same name, same issue. It's home to almost 100,000 people from different villages. I was very young when we left our home, but I can remember the fear on my family's face as they're getting ready, leaving everything behind. I could see their pain, especially on my mother's face. I still remember.

01:35

My family were one of the thousands of families that fled. Not everyone was lucky, some lost their lives while trying to escape. Because the journey was so dangerous, we had to hide frequently along the road. Where we used to live is only two hours away, but the journey took two days until we finally reached a safe place, the place that today we call Otash IDP camp. During the two days it took my family to the camp, we had nothing to eat and only a little water. My baby brother died from malnutrition. And he was not even two years old. My brother's passing affected me a lot. That's why I decided to go to college to study nutrition and medicine. Just to help others and find ways to prevent what happened to him.

02:30

In a world with so much food and so much prosperity, no one should ever die of hunger. I feel like I owe it to my baby brother to be better and do better, so I can help people like us, whether from Darfur or anywhere in the world.

02:45

I have big dreams, and I know education is my path to reaching them. Education is a basic right for every child. And it is the way each of us can get skills, tools and power to make change in our lives and in the world. Education is a basic right for all children, especially for those who have grown up only knowing violence and conflict. And education, also, is the way we make our future more secure and our present more peaceful.

03:23

A generation needs power to make change. And the greatest power that's ever known to all is the power of knowledge. When I read books, I feel like I'm no longer in my tiny room made of hay without electricity in the camp. I feel like I'm confident enough to say that I'm the captain of my destiny. From my room in the camp, I've been able to travel through books to Cairo, London and France, and all the way to Columbia University in New York.

03:56

And I know what most people may think about me, that I'm an internally displaced person. That may be true, but I am more than that. I am patience, I'm hope, dreams, and with education, I can get where I want to be.

04:10

Education in an IDP camp is hard, and Otash has certainly had its ups and downs. At the beginning, there were no schools nearby. Now there are schools, but they are not always free. And we don't always have access to electricity or access to internet like schools in many other countries. But education should be free for every child, and access to quality education should be a priority and available for all children. Meanwhile, as more people in Darfur have been displaced, the schools inside our camp have become overcrowded. But still, they have big dreams too. And in my state primary school exams, I came in third in the ranking out of thousands of students, which was a huge achievement for me. Soon I will take another test at the end of my secondary school, and then I hope to progress onward to University, moving step by step closer to my ultimate goal. Along the way, I've learned to speak three languages. I speak

fluently in Arabic, English and Turkish. And recently, I started to learn French. (French) J'ai de grands rêves.

05:27

(English) Learning languages makes me feel powerful, as they challenge my mind. And it also makes me feel I can communicate with other people, which is important to a connected and equitable world. And also, it's one of the many ways that can bring us all together as humans.

05:43

Because of my academic achievement, a few years ago, UNICEF Sudan wrote an article about me in which I shared my biggest dream to one day go to Columbia University and study medicine. And now today I am one of UNICEF Sudan Youth Advocates, championing the rights of other children to access quality education. I told you, I have big dreams.

06:08

Since becoming a Youth Advocate with UNICEF Sudan, I've been emphasizing the importance of peace and education. And I see how youth in the camp look up to me and how my parents and siblings ooze with pride with the opportunities I have been given, which makes me feel proud. And I love seeing everyone in the camp wants also to fight for education. Recently, I had the opportunity to fly to the capital of Sudan, Khartoum. It was the first time for me to be on an airplane and first time also to leave Nyala. I even had the opportunity to meet the prime minister of Sudan, along with other youth representing every state in Sudan, which was truly overwhelming for me. I, Makhtoum, from Otash IDP camp, with the Prime Minister of Sudan. But it was also an eye-opener. I connected with other youth who came to the capital with a heart full of hope and a mind filled with determination, wanting to share their stories from their parts in their country. I realized that, despite our different cultural backgrounds, we were all one. We have the same plight and needs. But we all wanted one thing: peace and fair treatment and access to services and opportunities. And this must be true with every child around the globe. The visit also reminded me that there is so much unfairness in this world. As I was lying in my hotel room with A/C on and electricity, I thought of how I struggle in the camp to study and to sleep because of lack of electricity. When I study, I rely on flashlights. I can't help but ask the question: Why? I realized that I'm in so many ways so lucky because I have opportunities to succeed in life, and I have the great privilege to continue to increase awareness about education for all children like

me and across the world. Imagine if they were given the skills, power and knowledge. Imagine the difference they would make in their life and in our world. They have big dreams, too.

08:28

Education, just like electricity, shouldn't just be for some, it's a necessity and a right. Just like hopes, dreams and opportunity. Shining a way forward for each of us and, in turn, allowing us to make the world better for others.

08:46

I am Makhtoum Abdalla from Otash IDP camp, but I am so much more than that. I say it proudly. With the power of education, I can make the world a better place. We all can.

08:59

Thank you.