Sudanese student brought to U of A with refugee program

SIMON VAYELIC
Staff News Editor

Akel Quir fled Sudan for a refugee camp in Kenya when he was six years old. He had to move from village to village, trying to stay ahead of armed groups that were targeting southern Sudan. While sheading, he's been in and out of many refugee camps that have had to flee war-torn homes.

Quir is now studying at the University of Alberta, thanks to the Student Refugee Program, administra
ted by the World University Service of Canada (WUSC). Undergraduate students at the U of A pay a $144 ded
dicted fee to support the program, which brings student refugees to study on campus. At the U of A, they cover the costs of tuition for four years.

Refugees students vying to get into the program face stiff competition. Quir said that it is difficult enough to study in a refugee camp, as refugees often run short and students grow hung. To get into the program, stu
dents have to struggle against the host of challenges they face and achieve good grades, despite their difficult surroundings.

As a result of the number of highly qualified applicants, refugees who are selected tend to perform exceptionally well, according to WUSC, 97 per cent of sponsored students complete or see in the process of completing their degrees.

Quir is the last student refugee to come to the U of A as part of the pro
gram. After arriving in Canada this past August, the 20-year-old is now study
ning for a Bachelor of Science degree.

"It is great that I finally made it to Canada. It is a long process, and a long journey that you want for a very long time," Quir said. "It finally comes out of hard work and determination."

While Quir joked that he sometimes feels like he's going to freeze when he walks to class from International House, he's dealing with tougher circum
stances. When he was young, southern Sudan was in a state of chaos.

"Our village was attacked when I was about two-and-a-half years old. So I feel with my parents — and I didn't know what was happening, but I could see dead people all around, houses were burning beyond recogni
tion. So we fled," Quir said.

For the next four years his family moved through towns, trying to avoid the fighting.

"Then the NCF [National Congress Party], the rebels, and they captured
that town. And in the process of capturing, many people were killed, people you know. So it's very traum
atizing. But it becomes normal, and when you see a dead person, it's just normal."

Quir explained that eventually, the war toll became too much, especially after his mother and two sisters were killed, leaving only him and his father.

"When I was six years old we just couldn't — because the war was diver
sifying, intensifying, in the whole of southern Sudan. So there was nowhere to hide anymore. So I just went to the Kenya-Sudan borders, and there we were rescued by the UN at the border
and taken to the refugee camp."

At the camp in Kenya, Quir stayed with relatives while his father went back to southern Sudan. Quir said that he stayed at the camps so he could receive an education that he couldn't attain if he returned home. Because of the disruption that the war caused, he hasn't seen his father in years.

Quir said that he was very impressed by the academic environment at the U of A and the quality of education he was encountering on campus. Nevertheless, he's been much tougher to get into Alberta.

"Now this first semester, I've been digesting, adapting, and settling in the weather, the foods, and the teach
ing system and everything," Quir said. "Most of the time, it is very hot [in Kenya]. It is the opposite of here, it is negative 30 here and it is positive 30 there."

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GSJS Annual General Meeting

Thursday, 2 December, 2010
6pm
Room 3-06
Students’ Union Building

Tentative Agenda:
1. Introductory remarks
2. Approval of 2009-2010 GSJS Audit (Allen & Associates)
3. Announcements
4. Retirements

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