

Obituary

Abusalih a Great Sudanese Pioneer Neurosurgeon and Politician

Abubakr Darrag Salim Ahmed,¹ Mohammed Awad Elzain²

¹National Center for Neurological Sciences, Khartoum Hospital, Khartoum, SUDAN; ²Neurosurgery Department, King Abdullah hospital-Bisha, SAUDI ARABIA

Received: 30 December 2021 / Accepted: 10 January 2022 / Published online: 23 June 2022

In the early morning of December, the 6th 2021, we lost a great Sudanese man, a neurosurgeon, a humanitarian activist and a politician after a long-life journey and a long struggle with health problems. The story of professor Abusalih with neurosurgery was a really challenging story and was full of success and difficulties which he overcame by effort and hard work. It was also full of his struggles during his political life.

Abusalih was born in Omdurman Almorada district in 1930 and he studied the primary, intermediate and secondary at Almorada primary school, Omdurman intermediate school and Wadisydna secondary schools in Omdurman, respectively. He then entered the Cambridge examination and he obtained high grades. He preferred to join Kasr Alainy Medical School in Cairo, Egypt in the late fifties of the last century and worked as a medical officer in south of Sudan in Wau. He preferred surgical discipline from the start and was sent to England to specialize in general surgery. He obtained the Fellowship of the Royal Colleges of Surgeons (FRCS) and then came back to Sudan to work as a general surgeon in Darfur in the west of Sudan. (<https://www.alnilin.com/706231.htm>).

In 1969 the Arab medical conference was held in Khartoum Sudan. The meeting was attended by pioneer Arab doctors; one of them was Professor Ahmed El-Banhawi from Ain Shams University, one of the first Egyptian and Arab neurosurgeons. He talked to Abusalih and knew from him that there were no neurosurgeons in Sudan and gave him the privilege of coming to Egypt and to get specialized neurosurgical training. Abusalih travelled to Egypt and stayed for 2 years from 1969 to 1971 then came back to Sudan.

The proper neurosurgical practice and proper neurosurgeons were not known till the early seventies (1971), when Dr. Hussein Suleiman Abusalih came back to Sudan after completing his surgical and neurosurgical training in England and Egypt to be named as the first Sudanese neurosurgeon. Before that the neurosurgical practice in Sudan was only non-specialized and was shouldered by the general and orthopedic surgeons who used to treat some neurosurgical problems like head injuries and spinal

compression by doing decompression for tuberculosis (TB) of the spine and disc prolapses. The difficult neurosurgical problems were used to be sent outside Sudan mainly to Egypt and England to be managed there.

Abusalih started the proper neurosurgical practice in Sudan by a small unit in AlShaab hospital which was the nucleus of the late department of neurosurgery in AlShaab hospital. He was faced first by the unavailability of neurosurgical equipment, and when one of his rich relatives who owned a medical company knew that, he brought all these equipment and instruments at his own expense. In his unit Dr. Abusalih practiced all the major specialties of the modern neurosurgery, from pediatric neurosurgery to adult spinal and cranial problems. He started with two beds at Khartoum hospital as a trauma department. He also established the theatre and intensive care unit (ICU) at AlShaab hospital, and stayed there till 2013. All these have been transferred to Ibrahim Malik hospital in 2013. Abusalih trained many colleagues at his department junior doctors and nurses.

I was informed by the late Adelola Adeloye (formerly Rufus Bandele Adelola Adeloye), who was the second Nigerian doctor to qualify as a neurological surgeon in 1967, that Dr. Abusalih with the late professor Dawood Mustafa (Professor of neurology at Khartoum University), the pioneer neurologist in Sudan, and other African doctors were the founders of the Pan African Association of Neurosciences (PAANS).

The Sudan Medical Specialization Board was established in 1998 and started to accept candidates to specialize in neurosurgery from 1999. Professor Abusalih was the first president of the neurosurgical board, and was continuously attending and leading the activities of that board. In August 14th 2009 and after establishment of the Sudanese Association of Neurosurgeons he was elected as the first president till 2015, then he was elected as the first honorary president. Abusalih has been known as the professor and examiner of neurosurgery for most of the graduate doctors in Sudan in the period from 1971 to 1985, then for the postgraduate doctors in the Sudan Medical Specialization Board since its establishment. (Figs. 1-3) He has also written many papers and many books such as "Inside the Ministry of Health", "My Experience at the Ministry of Social Development", "Ministry of Foreign Affairs" and "Neurosurgery in the seventies – Sudan".¹⁻³ (<http://abusalih.net/portal/content/publications>).

Correspondence:

Abubakr Darrag Salim Ahmed
National Center for Neurological Sciences, Khartoum Hospital, Khartoum, Sudan
E-mail: drdarrag666@yahoo.com



Fig 1: Professor Abusalih (Fourth from the right) with the World Federation of Neurosurgical Societies (WFNS) course delegates to Sudan, Sudanese neurosurgeons and residents in 2009.



Fig 2: Professor Abusalih (Second from the right in the grey dressing) attending a clinical meeting with Sudanese neuroscientists, neurosurgeons and residents.



Fig 3: Professor Abusalih (third from the right in the second row) attending a clinical meeting with Sudanese neuroscientists, neurosurgeons and residents.

Abusalih entered the politics from his medical background, during the rule of the previous Sudanese president Jaafar Numeri (1969-1985). Abusalih was elected as the president of the Sudanese Doctors Union, Khartoum branch, which was the largest branch in Sudan. The Sudanese people revolution against Jaafar Numeri was at its summit in April 1985. During those days most of Sudanese people were participating in the revolution which was led mainly by the Sudanese Doctor Union. The union declared a doctors' strike against the regimen and Abusalih and many of his colleagues were arrested. After

the success of the revolution on April 6th 1985, Abusalih was released, and when the government was formed Abusalih was named as the minister of health. Later he has been appointed as the minister of information then of social development in the eighties of the last century, then as minister of housing and then external affairs twice in the nineties (**Fig. 4**). (<https://www.alnilin.com/706231.htm>) He was then elected as the president of the Sudanese Red Crescent Society. On December the 6th 2021, we lost one of the greatest Sudanese men.

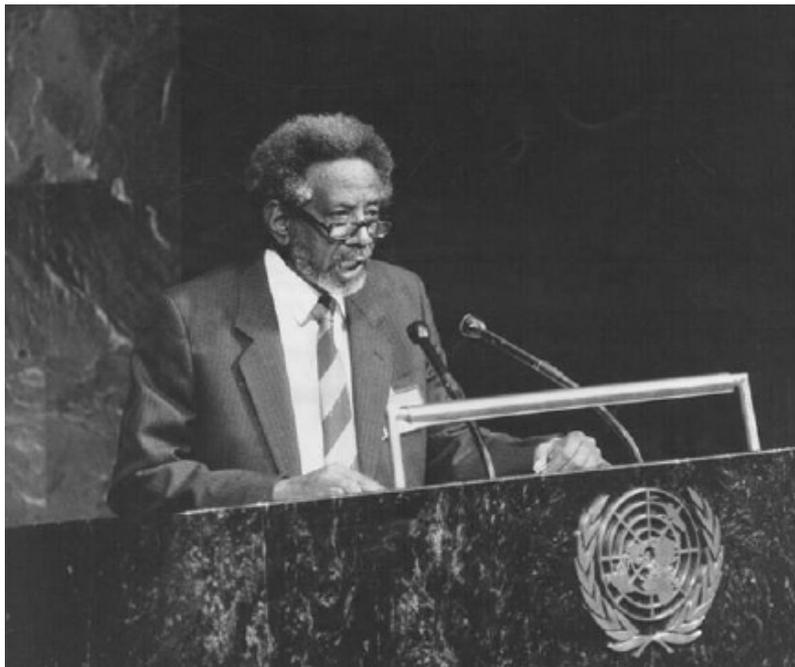


Fig 4: Professor Abusalih addressing the general assembly of the United Nations in New York in 1988.

List of Abbreviations

FRCS: Fellowship of the Royal Colleges of Surgeons.

ICU: Intensive care unit.

PAANS: Pan African Association of Neurosciences.

TB: Tuberculosis.

WFNS: World Federation of Neurosurgical Societies.

REFERENCES

1. Salih HS, El-Banhawy A. Meningiomas in the

Sudan. *Afr J Med Sci.* 1973;4(2):227-230.

2. Abdul-Rahman AM, Abu-Salih HS, Brun A, et al. Fibromuscular dysplasia of the cervico-cephalic arteries. *Surg Neurol.* 1978;9(4):217-222.

3. Abu-Salih HS, Abdul-Rahman AM. Tumors of the brain in the Sudan. *Surg Neurol.* 1988;29(3):194-196.