Introduction to the Altera SOPC Builder

This tutorial presents an introduction to Altera's SOPC Builder software, which is used to implement a system that uses the Nios II processor on an Altera FPGA device. The system development flow is illustrated by giving step-by-step instructions for using the SOPC Builder in conjuction with the Quartus II software to implement a simple system.

The last step in the development process involves configuring the designed circuit in an actual FPGA device, and running an application program. To show how this is done, it is assumed that the user has access to the Altera DE2 Development and Education board connected to a computer that has Quartus II and Nios II software installed.

The screen captures in the tutorial were obtained using the Quartus II version 5.1; if other versions of the software are used, some of the images may be slightly different.

Contents: Nios II System Altera's SOPC Builder Integration of the Nios II System into a Quartus II Project Running the Application Program Altera's Nios II is a soft processor, defined in a hardware description language, which can be implemented in Altera's FPGA devices by using the Quartus[®] II CAD system. To implement a useful system it is necessary to add other functional units such as memories, input/output interfaces, timers, and communications interfaces. To facilitate the implementation of such systems, it is useful to have computer-aided-design (CAD) software for implementing a system-on-a-programmable-chip (SOPC). Altera's SOPC Builder is the software needed for this task.

This tutorial provides a basic introduction to Altera's SOPC Builder, which will allow the reader to quickly implement a simple Nios II system on the Altera DE2 board. For a fuller treatment of the SOPC Builder, the reader can consult the *Nios II Hardware Development Tutorial*. A complete description of the SOPC Builder can be found in the *Quartus II Handbook Volume 4: SOPC Builder*. These documents are available on the Altera web site.

1 Nios II System

A Nios II system can be implemented on the DE2 board as shown in Figure 1.



Figure 1. A Nios II system implemented on the DE2 board.

The Nios II processor and the interfaces needed to connect to other chips on the DE2 board are implemented in the Cyclone II FPGA chip. These components are interconnected by means of the interconnection network called the Avalon Switch Fabric. The memory blocks in the Cyclone II device can be used to provide an on-chip memory for the Nios II processor. The SRAM, SDRAM and Flash memory chips on the DE2 board are accessed through the appropriate interfaces. Parallel and serial input/output interfaces provide typical I/O ports used in computer systems. A special JTAG UART interface is used to connect to the circuitry that provides a Universal Serial Bus (USB) link to the host computer to which the DE2 board is connected. This circuitry and the associated software is called the *USB-Blaster*. Another module, called the JTAG Debug module, is provided to allow the host computer to control the Nios II system. It makes it possible to perform operations such as downloading programs into memory, starting and stopping execution, setting breakpoints, and collecting real-time execution trace data.

Since all parts of the Nios II system implemented on the FPGA chip are defined by using a hardware description language, a knowledgeable user could write such code to implement any part of the system. This would be an onnerous and time consuming task. Instead, one can use the SOPC Builder to implement a desired system simply by choosing the required components and specifying the parameters needed to make each component fit the overall requirements of the system. In this tutorial, we will illustrate the capability of the SOPC Builder by designing a very simple system. The same approach is used to design large systems.



Figure 2. A simple example of a Nios II system.

Our example system is given in Figure 2. The system realizes a trivial task. Eight toggle switches on the DE2 board, SW7 - 0, are used to turn on or off the eight green LEDs, LEDG7 - 0. The switches are connected to the Nios II system by means of a parallel I/O interface configured to act as an input port. The LEDs are driven by the signals from another parallel I/O interface configured to act as an output port. To achieve the desired operation, the eight-bit pattern corresponding to the state of the switches has to be sent to the output port to activate the LEDs. This will be done by having the Nios II processor execute a program stored in the on-chip memory. Continuous operation is required, such that as the switches are toggled the lights change accordingly.

We will use the SOPC Builder to design the hardware depicted in Figure 2. Next, we will assign the Cyclone II pins to realize the connections between the parallel interfaces and the switches and LEDs which act as I/O devices. Then, we will configure the FPGA to implement the designed system. Finally, we will use the software tool called the *Nios II Debug Client* to assemble, download and execute a Nios II program that performs the desired task.

Doing this tutorial, the reader will learn about:

- Using the SOPC Builder to design a Nios II-based system
- Integrating the designed Nios II system into a Quartus II project
- Implementing the designed system on the DE2 board
- Running an application program on the Nios II processor

2 Altera's SOPC Builder

The SOPC Builder is a tool used in conjuction with the Quartus II CAD software. It allows the user to easily create a system based on the Nios II processor, by simply selecting the desired functional units and specifying their parameters. To implement the system in Figure 2, we have to instantiate the following functional units:

- Nios II processor, which is referred to as a Central Processing Unit (CPU); we will use the standard 32-bit version of the processor
- On-chip memory, which consists of the memory blocks in the Cyclone II chip; we will specify a 4-Kbyte memory arranged in 32-bit words
- Two parallel I/O interfaces
- JTAG UART interface for communication with the host computer

To define the desired system, start the Quartus II software and perform the following steps:

- Create a new Quartus II project for your system. As shown in Figure 3, we stored our project in a directory called *sopc_builder_tutorial*, and we assigned the name *lights* to both the project and its top-level design entity. You can choose a different directory or project name, but be aware that the SOPC Builder software does not permit the use of spaces in file names. For example, an attempt to use a directory name *sopc builder tutorial* would lead to an error. In your project, choose the EP2C35F672C6 chip as the target device, because this is the FPGA on the DE2 board.
- 2. Select Tools > SOPC Builder, which leads to the pop-up box in Figure 4. Enter *nios_system* as the system name; this will be the name of the system that the SOPC Builder will generate. Choose Verilog as the target HDL, in which the system module will be specified. Click OK to reach the window in Figure 5.

New Project Wizard: Directory, Name , Top-Level Entity [page 1 of 5	5] [×
What is the working directory for this project?		
D:\sopc_builder_tutorial		
,		
What is the name of this project?	- 1	
, -		
What is the name of the top-level design entity for this project? This name is case ser and must exactly match the entity name in the design file.	nsitive	
lights		
Use Existing Project Settings		
		_
< Back Next > Finish	Cancel	

Figure 3. Create a new project.

system Name:	nios_system
Target HDL	
💿 Veril	og 🔿 VHDL

Figure 4. Create a new Nios II system.

- 3. Figure 5 displays the System Contents tab of the SOPC Builder, which is used to add components to the system and configure the selected components to meet the design requirements. The available components are listed on the left side of the window. Before choosing our components, examine the area in the figure labeled Target. A drop-down list is provided that allows some available Altera boards to be selected. It is not necessary to select a board, and since the DE2 board is not included in the list leave the selection as Unspecified board. Next, check the setting for the Device Family and ensure that Cyclone II is selected.
- 4. The Nios II processor runs under the control of a clock. For this tutorial we will make use of the 50-MHz clock that is provided on the DE2 board. As shown in Figure 5, it is possible to specify the names and frequency of clock signals in the SOPC Builder display. If not already included in this list, specify a clock named *clk* with the source designated as External and the frequency set to 50.0 MHz.

tem Contents System Generation	1					
Attera SOPC Builder Create New Components Avalon Components Avalon Tristate Bridg Communication JTAG UART Avalon Tristate Bridg Communication JTAG UART SPI (3 Wire Serial) UART (RS-232 serial DI5550 UART with 1 DI2CM I2C Bus Interf DI2CSB I2C Bus Interf HI5550S UART - CA High Performance Gi	Target Board: Unspecified Board Device Family: Cyclone II	HardCopy Compatible	Clock clk click to add	Source External	MHz 50.0	Pipelin
	Use Module Name	Description		Input Clock	Base	End
High Performance Gir						

Figure 5. The System Contents tab window.

- 5. Next, specify the processor as follows:
 - On the left side of the window in Figure 5 select Avalon Components > Nios II Processor Altera Corporation and click Add, which leads to the window in Figure 6.

💶 Altera Nios II - c	ри_0			
Nios II Core Cache	s & Tightly Coupled Memories	TAG Debug Module Custom Ins	tructions	
Select a Nios II core:				
	⊙Nios II/e	○Nios II/s	○Nios II/f	
Nios II Selector Guide Family: Cyclone II f _{system:} 50 MHz	RISC 32-bit	RISC 32-bit Instruction Cache Branch Prediction Hardware Multiply Hardware Divide	RISC 32-bit Instruction Cache Branch Prediction Hardware Multiply Hardware Divide Barrel Shifter Data Cache Dynamic Branch Prediction	
Performance at 50 MHz		Up to 26 DMIPS	Up to 56 DMIPS	
Logic Usage	600-700 LEs	1200-1400 LEs	1400-1800 LEs	
Memory Usage Haro	Two M4Ks dware Multiply; Embedded Multi	Two M4Ks + cache	Three M4Ks + cache Hardware Divide	
	Cancel	< Prev Next >	Finish	

Figure 6. Create a Nios II processor.

• Choose Nios II/e which is the simplest version of the processor. Click Finish to return to the window in Figure 5, which now shows the Nios II processor specified as indicated in Figure 7. There may be some warnings or error messages displayed in the SOPC Builder Messages window (at the bottom of the screen), because some parameters have not yet been specified. Ignore these messages as we will provide the necessary data later. Observe also that a new tab called **Nios II More "cpu_0" Settings** appears, which allows further configuration of the processor - we will not use it.

vstem Contents Nios II More "cpu_0"	Settings Sy	/stem Generation						
Altera SOPC Builder	- Targe	.t		Clock	Source	e M	1Hz	Pipeline
Avalon Components	Board	: Unspecified Board	~	clk	Externa	al 50.	.0	
 Nios Il Processor - Altera Bridges 	Devir	ce Family: Cyclone II 🔛 🔲	HardCopy Compatible	click to add	6 19	1		5
Avalon Tristate Bridg Communication	-			4				
JTAG UART	Use	Module Name	Description		Input Clock	Base	End	IF
SPI (3 Wire Serial)		🖂 cpu_0	Nios II Processor - Alter	a Corporation cl	k.			1,111,1
UART (RS-232 serial		<pre>instruction_master data_master</pre>	Master port Master port	2			20.0	IRQ 31 4
O D16550 UART with 1 O DI2CM I2C Bus Interfs	L	tag debug module	Slave port	3		0x00000		00007FF
O DSPI Serial Periphera								
			Move Up	✓ Move Down				
O H16550S UART CA O H8250 CAST, Inc. O High Performance Git & O High Performance Git &	east 0x20 by	tes higher than the Reset Address		Move Down				

Figure 7. The defined processor.

- 6. To specify the on-chip memory perform the following:
 - Select Avalon Components > Memory > On-Chip Memory (RAM or ROM) and click Add
 - In the On-Chip Memory Configuration Wizard window, shown in Figure 8, set the memory width to 32 bits and the total memory size to 4 Kbytes
 - Do not change the other default settings
 - Click Finish, which returns to the System Contents tab as indicated in Figure 9

哇 On-chip Memory - onchip_memory_0 🛛 🗙
Memory Type
RAM (writeable) O ROM (read-only)
Dual-Port Access
Block Type: Automatic 😒
_ Size
Memory Width: 32 💙 bits
Total Memory Size: 4 Kbytes 🗸
Read Latency
Slave s1 1 💙 Slave s2 1 💌
Non-Default Memory Initialization
Enable Non-Default Intialization File
User-created initialization file: onchip_memory_0 .hex
Memory will be initialized from onchip_memory_0.hex Automatically choosing M4K blocks (the only available block type)
Cancel < Prev Next > Finish

Figure 8. Define the on-chip memory.

	- Targ			Clock	Source	e MHz	Pipe	line
	1222020	d: Unspecified Board	HardCopy Compatible	clk click to add	Externa	1 50.0		
	Use	Module Name	Description		Input Clock	Base	End	IRQ
		cpu_0 instruction_master data_master itag_debug_module	Nios II Processor - Alter Master port Master port Slave port	a Corporation	cik	IRQ 0 0x0000000		
CompactFlash Interfa OMA Mailbox								
Add 🕥 Check	77		Move Up	▼ Move Dow	n			

Figure 9. The on-chip memory is included.

- 7. Specify the input parallel I/O interface as follows:
 - Select Avalon Components > Other > PIO (Parallel I/O) and click Add to reach the PIO Configuration Wizard in Figure 10

- Specify the width of the port to be 8 bits and choose the direction of the port to be Input, as shown in the figure
- Click Finish to return to the System Contents tab as given in Figure 11

🛓 Avalon PIO - pio_0 🛛 🔁							
Basic Settings Input Options Simulation							
Width							
8 bits							
PIO width must be between 1 and 32 bits							
Direction							
Bidirectional (tri-state) ports							
• Input ports only							
O Both input and output ports							
Output ports only							
Cancel < Prev Next > Finish							

Figure 10. Define a parallel input interface.

System Contents Nios II More "cpu_0" :	Settings :	System Generation					
O IDT71V016 SRAM for Cegacy SDRAM Cont O Legacy SDRAM Cont Other Other OrnpactFlash Interfa ODMA Interval timer Malbox Mutex PIO (Parallel I/O) PLL (Phase-Locked L System ID Peripheral ODMA Controller - Eur P-PCI Peripherals U PHErfaces AHB Components V		d: Unspecified Board	✓ HardCopy Compatible	Clock clk click to so	Source Externa		Pipeline
	Use	Module Name	Description		Input Clock	Base	End IR
		□ cpu_0 instruction_master data_master tag_debug_module □ onchip_memory_0 □ pio_0	Nios II Processor - Alter Master port Master port Slave port On-Chip Memory (RAM PIO (Parallel VO)		clk clk	IRQ 0 0x0000000 0x00001000 0x00000800	0x000007FF 0x00001FFF
Add Check			Move Up	▼ Move Do	wn	_	

Figure 11. The parallel input interface is included.

- 8. In the same way, specify the output parallel I/O interface:
 - Select Avalon Components > Other > PIO (Parallel I/O) and click Add to reach the PIO Configuration Wizard again
 - Specify the width of the port to be 8 bits and choose the direction of the port to be Output
 - Click Finish to return to the System Contents tab
- 9. We wish to connect to a host computer and provide a means for communication between the Nios II system and the host computer. This can be accomplished by instantiating the JTAG UART interface as follows:
 - Select Avalon Components > Communication > JTAG UART and click Add to reach the JTAG UART Configuration Wizard in Figure 12
 - Do not change the default settings
 - Click Finish to return to the System Contents tab

🖳 JTAG UART - jtag_uart_0	×
Configuration Simulation	
Write FIFO (data from Avalon to JTAG)	
Depth: 64 💌 IRQ Threshold: 8	
Construct using registers instead of memory blocks	
Read FIFO (data from JTAG to Avalon)	
Depth: 64 V IRQ Threshold: 8	
Construct using registers instead of memory blocks	
Cancel < Prev Next > Finish	

Figure 12. Define the JTAG UART interface.

- 10. The complete system is depicted in Figure 13. Note that the SOPC Builder automatically chooses names for the various components. The names are not necessarily descriptive enough to be easily associated with the target design, but they can be changed. In Figure 2, we use the names Switches and LEDs for the parallel input and output interfaces, respectively. These names can be used in the implemented system. Right-click on the pio_0 name and then select Rename. Change the name to Switches. Similarly, change pio_1 to LEDs.
- 11. The base and end addresses of the various components in the designed system can be assigned by the user, but they can also be assigned automatically by the SOPC Builder. We will choose the latter possibility. So, select the command (using the menus at the top af the SOPC Builder window) System > Auto-Assign Base Addresses, which produces the assignment shown in Figure 14.

System Contents Nios II More "cpu_0"	Settings	System Generation					
Altera SOPC Builder	155315	d: Unspecified Board	HardCopy Compatible	Clock clk click to ad	Sourc Externa	The second second second	Pipelin
Bridges Avalon Tristate Bridg Communication JTAG UART	Use	Module Name	Description		Input Clock	Base	End I
	V	cpu 0 instruction_master data_master ftag_debug_module conchip_memory_0 Switches cl_LEDs ftag_uart_0	Nios II Processor - Alter Master port Slave port PIO (Parallel I/O) PIO (Parallel I/O) JTAG UART	or ROM)	clk clk clk clk clk clk	IRQ 0 0x0000000 0x00001000 0x0000800 0x0000800 0x0000810 0x0000820	0x00001FFF 0x0000080F 0x0000081F
			Move Up	 Move Do 	wn		

Figure 13. The complete system.

iystem Contents Nios II More "cpu_0"	Settings S	ystem Generation						
Attera SOPC Builder Create New Component Avalon Components Avalon Components Avalon Tristate Bridge Communication		I: Unspecified Board	HardCopy Compatible	Clock clk click to ac	Source Externa	in the second	Pipel	ne]]
	Use	Module Name	Description		Input Clock	Base	End	IRC
JTAG UART		E cpu 0	Nios II Processor - Alter	a Cornoration		0000	Error	
Oracio Dant Oracio Dant Oracio Dant Oracio Dant Oracio Dant Oracio Dant Oracio Di Sono Dant Oracio Di Constructioni 1 Oracio Di Constructinationi 1 Oracio Di Constructioni 1		instruction_master data_master jtag_debug_module I onchip_memory_0 I Switches I LEDs I jtag_uart_0	Master port Master port Slave port On-Chip Memory (RAM PIO (Parallel I/O) PIO (Parallel I/O) JTAG UART	or ROM)	cik cik cik cik cik	IRQ 0 0x00001000 0x0000000 0x0001800 0x0001810 0x00001820	0x000017FF 0x00000FFF 0x0000180F 0x0000181F	
All Available Component Component Add Check Cpu_0: defaulting Reset Address, Exce cpu_0: The reset address points to vola Done checking for updates.			Move Up	▼ Move Do	wn	_	_	

Figure 14. The final specification.

12. Having specified all components needed to implement the desired system, it can now be generated. Select the System Generation tab, which leads to the window in Figure 15. Turn off Simulation - Create simulator project files, because in this tutorial we will not deal with the simulation of hardware. Click

Generate on the bottom of the SOPC Builder window. The generation process produces the messages displayed in the figure. When the message "SUCCESS: SYSTEM GENERATION COMPLETED" appears, click Exit. This returns to the main Quartus II window.

Altera SOPC Builder - nios_system	
File Module System View Tools Help	
System Contents Nios II More "cpu_0" Settings System Generation	
Options	
Run Nios II IDE	
In the system module logic in Verilog.	
Simulation. Create simulator project files.	
Info: to the terms and conditions of the Altera Program License	~
Info: Subscription Agreement, Altera MegaCore Function License	
Info: Agreement, or other applicable license agreement, including,	
Info: without limitation, that your use is for the sole purpose of	
Info: programming logic devices manufactured by Altera and sold by	
Info: Altera or its authorized distributors. Please refer to the	
Info: applicable agreement for further details.	
Info: Processing started: Wed Apr 19 17:32:56 2006	
Info: Command: quartus_sh -t nios_system_setup_quartus.tcl	
Info: Evaluation of Tcl script nios_system_setup_quartus.tcl was successful	
Info: Quartus II Shell was successful. O errors, O warnings	
Info: Processing ended: Wed Apr 19 17:32:57 2006	
Info: Elapsed time: 00:00:01	
# 2006.04.19 17:32:57 (*) Completed generation for system: nios_system.	
# 2006.04.19 17:32:57 (*) THE FOLLOWING SYSTEM ITEMS HAVE BEEN GENERATED:	
SOPC Builder database : D:/sopc_builder_tutorial/nios_system.ptf	
System HDL Model : D:/sopc_builder_tutorial/nios_system.v	
System Generation Script : D:/sopc_builder_tutorial/nios_system_generation_script	
# 2006.04.19 17:32:57 (*) SUCCESS: SYSTEM GENERATION COMPLETED.	
Press 'Exit' to exit.	*
	>
cpu_0 was generated as plain-text HDL. cpu_0: The reset address points to volatile memory. Execution of undefined code may occur upon reset. Done checking for updates. Exit. < Prev Next > Re-Generate	

Figure 15. Generation of the system.

Changes to the designed system are easily made at any time by reopening the SOPC Builder tool. Any component in the System Contents tab of the SOPC Builder can be selected and deleted, or a new component can be added and the system regenerated.

3 Integration of the Nios II System into a Quartus II Project

To complete the hardware design, we have to perform the following:

- Instantiate the module generated by the SOPC Builder into the Quartus II project
- Assign the FPGA pins
- Compile the designed circuit
- Program and configure the Cyclone II device on the DE2 board

3.1 Instantiation of the Module Generated by the SOPC Builder

The instantiation of the generated module depends on the design entry method chosen for the overall Quartus II project. We have chosen to use Verilog HDL, but the approach is similar for both VHDL and schematic entry methods.

Normally, the Nios II module is likely to be a part of a larger design. However, in the case of our simple example there is no other circuitry needed. All we need to do is instantiate the Nios II system in our top-level Verilog file, and connect inputs and outputs of the parallel I/O ports, as well as the clock and reset inputs, to the appropriate pins on the Cyclone II device.

The Verilog module generated by the SOPC Builder is in the file *nios_system.v* in the directory of the project. Note that the name of the Verilog module is the same as the system name specified when first using the SOPC Builder. The Verilog code is quite large. Figure 16 depicts the portion of the code that defines the input and output signals for the module *nios_system*. The 8-bit vector that is the input to the parallel port *Switches* is called *in_port_to_the_Switches*. The 8-bit output vector is called *out_port_from_the_LEDs*. The clock and reset signals are called *clk* and *reset_n*, respectively. Note that the reset signal is added automatically by the SOPC Builder; it is called *reset_n* because it is active low.



Figure 16. A part of the generated Verilog module.

Figure 17 shows a top-level Verilog module that instantiates the Nios II system. This module is named *lights*, because this is the name we specified in Figure 3 for the top-level design entity in our Quartus II project. Note that the input and output ports of the module use the pin names for the 50-MHz clock, *CLOCK_50*, pushbutton switches, *KEY*, toggle switches, *SW*, and green LEDs, *LEDG*, that are specified in the DE2 User Manual. Type this code into a file called *lights.v*. Add this file and all the *.v files produced by the SOPC Builder to your Quartus II project. Also, add the necessary pin assignments on the DE2 board to your project. The procedure for making pin assignments is described in the tutorial *Quartus II Introduction Using Verilog Design*. Note that an easy way of making the pin assignments when we use the same pin names as in the DE2 User Manual is to import the assignments given in the file called *DE2_pin_assignments.csv* in the directory *DE2_tutorials\design_files*, which is included on the CD-ROM that accompanies the DE2 board and can also be found on Altera's DE2 web pages.

Since the system we are designing needs to operate at a 50-MHz clock frequency, add the needed timing assignment in your Quartus II project. The tutorial *Timing Considerations with Verilog-Based Designs* shows how this is done. // Implements a simple Nios II system for the DE2 board. // Inputs: SW7-0 are parallel port inputs to the Nios II system // CLOCK_50 is the system clock // KEY0 is the active-low system reset // Outputs: LEDG7-0 are parallel port outputs from the Nios II system module lights (SW, KEY, CLOCK_50, LEDG); **input** [7:0] SW; **input** [0:0] KEY; input CLOCK_50; output [7:0] LEDG; // Instantiate the Nios II system module generated by the SOPC Builder: // nios system (clk, reset n, out port from the LEDs, in port to the Switches) nios_system NiosII (CLOCK_50, KEY[0], LEDG, SW);

endmodule

Figure 17. Instantiating the Nios II system.

Having made the necessary settings compile the code. You may see some warning messages associated with the Nios II system, such as some signals being unused or having wrong bit-lengths of vectors; these warnings can be ignored.

3.2 Programming and Configuration

Program and configure the Cyclone II FPGA in the JTAG programming mode as follows:

- 1. Connect the DE2 board to the host computer by means of a USB cable plugged into the USB-Blaster port. Turn on the power to the DE2 board. Ensure that the RUN/PROG switch is in the RUN position.
- 2. Select Tools > Programmer to reach the window in Figure 18.
- 3. If not already chosen by default, select JTAG in the Mode box. Also, if the USB-Blaster is not chosen by default, press the Hardware Setup... button and select the USB-Blaster in the window that pops up.
- 4. The configuration file *lights.sof* should be listed in the window. If the file is not already listed, then click Add File and select it.
- 5. Click the box under Program/Configure to select this action.
- 6. At this point the window settings should appear as indicated in Figure 18. Press Start to configure the FPGA.

🛍 lights.cdf						
🔔 Hardware Setup	USB-Blaster [USB-0]		Mode: JTAG		✓ Progress:	0%
🔲 Enable real-time l	SP to allow background program	nming (for MAX II devic	ces)			
🏴 Start	File	Device	Checksum	Usercode	Program/ Configure Ver	ify Blank- Check Examine
🛍 Stop	lights.sof	EP2C35F672	00420547	FFFFFFF		
Auto Detect						
🗙 Delete						
🚵 Add File						
👺 Change File						
Save File						
Add Device						
M ^{to} Up	<					>



4 Running the Application Program

Having configured the required hardware in the FPGA device, it is now necessary to create and execute an application program that performs the desired operation. This can be done by writing the required program either in the Nios II assembly language or in a high-level language such as C. We will illustrate both approaches.

A parallel I/O interface generated by the SOPC Builder is accessible by means of registers in the interface. Depending on how the PIO is configured, there may be as many as four registers. One of these registers is called the Data register. In a PIO configured as an input interface, the data read from the Data register is the data currently present on the PIO input lines. In a PIO configured as an output interface, the data written (by the Nios II processor) into the Data register drives the PIO output lines. If a PIO is configured as a bidirectional interface, then the PIO inputs and outputs use the same physical lines. In this case there is a Data Direction register included, which determines the direction of the input/output transfer. In our unidirectional PIOs, it is only necessary to have the Data register. The addresses assigned by the SOPC Builder are 0x00001800 for the Data register in the PIO called Switches and 0x00001810 for the Data register in the PIO called LEDs, as indicated in Figure 14.

You can find a full description of the PIO interface by opening the SOPC Builder window in Figure 14 and right-clicking on the module name of a PIO (either Switches or LEDs). Then, in the pop-up box select Data Sheet to open the document *PIO Core with Avalon Interface* which gives a full description of the interface. To use this facility you need to be connected to the Internet.

4.1 Using a Nios II Assembly Language Program

Figure 19 gives a Nios II assembly-language program that implements our trivial task. The program loads the addresses of the Data registers in the two PIOs into processor registers r2 and r3. It then has an infinite loop that merely transfers the data from the input PIO, *Switches*, to the output PIO, *LEDs*. Note that the program contains a statement that includes the *nios_macros*, and two statements, GFUNC and BREAK, needed to assemble the program properly.

.include "nios_macros.s"

.equ Switches, 0x00001800 .equ LEDs, 0x00001810

GFUNC _start

	movia	r2, Switches
	movia	r3, LEDs
loop:	ldbio	r4, 0(r2)
	stbio	r4, 0(r3)
	br	loop

BREAK

Figure 19. Assembly language code to control the lights.

Enter this code into a file *lights.s* and place the file into a working directory. We placed the file into directory *sopc_builder_tutorial\app_software*. The program has to be assembled and converted into an S-Record file, *lights.srec*, suitable for downloading into the implemented Nios II system.

Altera provides the *monitor* software, called *Nios II Debug Client*, for use with the DE2 board. This software provides a simple means for compiling, assembling and downloading of programs into a Nios II system implemented on a DE2 board. It also makes it possible for the user to perform debugging tasks. A description of this software is available in the *Nios II Debug Client* tutorial.

Open the Nios II Debug Client, which leads to the window in Figure 20. This software needs to know the characteristics of the designed Nios II system, which are given in the ptf file *lights.ptf*. Select the file *lights.ptf* as indicated in the figure. Note that this file is in the design directory *sopc_builder_tutorial*. The Nios II Debug Client also needs to know where to load the application program. In our case, this is the memory block in the FPGA device. The SOPC builder assigned the name *onchip_memory_0* to this block. If not already done, select this name in the window in Figure 20. Having provided the necessary information, click Confirm.

Next, the main Nios II Debug Client window appears, as shown in Figure 21. To assemble and download the *light.s* program click Compile & Load. A dialog box in Figure 22 appears. Select the file *lights.s* as indicated in the figure and click Open.

As a result of opening the file, the Nios II Debug Client invokes an assembler program, followed by a linker program. The commands used to invoke these programs, and the output they produce, can be viewed in the Debug tab of the Client window. The downloaded program is displayed in the Disassemble tab of the Client window as illustrated in Figure 23. Observe that **movia** is a *pseudoinstruction* which is implemented as two separate instructions. See the *Nios II Processor Reference Handbook* for a description of the Nios II instruction set.

Click Run to execute the program. With the program running, you can now test the design by turning the switches, SW7 to SW0 on and off; the LEDs should respond accordingly.

👙 Settings Window				
-Nios II System Propertie	S			
	Look <u>i</u> n: 📑	sopc_builder_tutorial		
	sopc_buil	der		
	db 🛅			
	nios_syste			
	nios_syste	em.ptf		
SOPC Builder PTF File				
	File <u>N</u> ame:	nios_system.ptf		
	Files of <u>T</u> ype:	SOPC Builder PTF Files (.ptf)		
Program Memory	onchip_memory	/_0		
Selected Memory Size : 4 Kbytes				
Confirm				

Figure 20. The Nios II Debug Client Settings window.

🐐 Nios II Debug Client (n2client)				
File Help				
Connect Using				
USB-Blaster [USB-0]				-
NIOS II Debug Output			Registers	
Disassemble \ Memory \ Advanced \ Console \	Trace \ Debug \		Register	Value
	mace (Debbg (RO (zero)	00000000 -
		-	R1 (at)	00000000
			R2	00000000
			R3	00000000
			R4	00000000
			R5	00000000
			Ró	00000000
			R7	00000000
			R8	00000000
			DO	nnonnnn
			-Interesting I	Memory
			Туре	Address Data
X		•		
Disassemble Controls			Break + Wa	tch
Start Address (or Symbol)	um Instructions	Print		
				4
Next Instruction				
				*
NOP				*
NIOSII Controls				
Compile & Load				
Disconnect				

Figure 21. The Nios II Debug Client window.

👙 Open			×
Look In: 🗀	app_software	-	
ights.s			
File <u>N</u> ame:	lights.s		
Files of <u>Typ</u> e:	Assembly Language Source Files (.s)		-
	[Open	Cancel





Figure 23. Display of the downloaded program.

The Nios II Debug Client allows a number of useful functions to be performed in a simple manner. They include:

- single stepping through the program
- examining the contents of processor registers
- examining the contents of the memory
- setting breakpoints for debugging purposes
- · disassembling the downloaded program

A description of this software and all of its features is available in the Nios II Debug Client tutorial.

4.2 Using a C-Language Program

An application program written in the C language can be handled in the same way as the assembly-language program. A C program that implements our simple task is given in Figure 24. Enter this code into a file called *lights.c.*

> #define Switches (volatile char *) 0x0001800 #define LEDs (char *) 0x0001810

void main()
{ while (1)
 *LEDs = *Switches;
}

Figure 24. C language code to control the lights.

To use this program, get to the window in Figure 21 and press **Compile & Load**. In the dialog box in Figure 22 select the file *lights.c*. The rest of the operation is the same as described above.

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