

NEW REALITIES ON THE SUDANESE POLITICAL LANDSCAPE

Peace, Democracy and Nation Building Challenges

I would like to express my deep gratitude to the Norwegian people and the Norwegian Government for their continuous humanitarian support to the people of the Sudans, especially the war-affected civil population, and for their involvement in the peace building process. My thanks go especially to the Support Group for Peace in Sudan and South Sudan and in particular to its chair, Marit Harness. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the Norwegian People's Aid, the Norwegian Council for Africa and all the other organizations who have made this visit possible. Last but not least let me also extend my thanks and appreciation to Liv Torres, the director of the Norwegian Nobel Center.

The challenges that have been facing Sudan for more than "sixty" years of its independence from the British have always been nation building and the possibility of building a modern state based on equal citizenship, democracy and social justice. Respect of the cultural, religious and social diversities of the Sudanese Communities has been a key element in the heart of the nation building issues. Failing to absorb this cardinal reality led to the secession of South Sudan, and indeed, is threatening the very existence of the rest of the Sudan. Nation formation and nation building is a key issue for any reliable and successful national project. It is prudent upon the Sudanese stake holders to recognize the historical and contemporary diversities and build a modern state based on equal citizenship without discrimination, and a program that is geared towards democracy and social justice. Sudanism is the only commonality that can unite Sudanese, regardless of their respective backgrounds. The political Islam program has shaken the basis of the Sudanese commonality, and it is a program that cannot yield a national consensus. It is important to stress that the political Islam agenda has not only threatened the Sudanese national unity and nation building, but is also an agenda that poses a threat to the whole of the African continent, as Africa is a continent of diversity, as well as the world at large.

Khartoum Regime Reaching End of its Journey

The national congress regime is facing multiple crisis; economically, politically, culturally and socially. These have manifested in the bankruptcy of the political class, and it is clear the regime no longer has a foundation to exist upon. It is known that the regime was depending on a narrow social base and can only keep power in their hands through wars and security repression. Therefore, wars and the cracking down on opposition is an integral part of the NCP governance. Since they took over power, they have been facing continuous resistance in the rural and urban areas of Sudan, and they continued to wage war in the marginalized areas, and to repress the resistance of the mass movement in the urban areas. However, the days when the regime enjoyed spending oil money on their military, security and political institutions are gone, and the core of the regime's political brain is divided. The regime tried to reproduce its system and widen its social base through an empty national dialogue that could not address the main problems facing Sudan, such as putting an end to wars, providing freedoms, basic rights and services, a democratic system of governance, as well as normalizing relations with the outside world. They were not ready to give concessions; they were only interested in reproducing their system at the peak of their economic and political crisis. The Sudan Government was neither ready to stop the bombardment of the civilian population in the war zones, nor open humanitarian corridors to end the civilian population suffering - especially in the Nuba Mountains and Blue Nile where they have denied humanitarian access for about six years, while committing war crimes, as well as the continued genocide in Darfur.

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The armed struggle was the main means of struggle during the early years of the dictatorship of the national congress, where they systematically destroyed the peaceful means in what they called the 'empowerment policy'. In this policy, they changed the nature of different state institutions and completely politicized them, including the security sector. Nevertheless, this dictatorial regime has been the dictatorship in which the Sudanese people have paid the heaviest price in their continuous struggle against, with millions displaced persons, refugees, wounded casualties and the struggle of the Sudanese people has continued throughout the past 27 years. At this point in time however, there is a qualitative change, and the peaceful mass movement is taking the lead. We can certainly say the peaceful resistance of the Sudanese people has been born again and the political landscape is pregnant and expecting a new born. This new mass movement consists of:

- Official opposition, with all its components and different alliances.
- New professionals and syndicate movements that include medical doctors, lawyers, pharmacists, university lecturers, plus teachers unions.
- New social movement of youth, women, students and others.
- Movements of specific causes; land grabbing, dams, farmers, internally displaced and others.
- Social media groups, who played a major role in the civil disobedience of November 27th and December 19th, are emerging as a powerful and youthful group, injecting new blood into the political life, and looking for a new political agenda for the future of Sudan. They are the very youth who were brought up during the national congress' dictatorship and were targeted by a lot of brain washing programmes. The youth are sending a clear message that the present regime, does not represent any future for them. Therefore, equally, the regime has no future. What has taken place is because of the accumulative struggle throughout the last 27 years, including the years of the interim period of the CPA, which provided a relative opening up for political debate, as well as critical events such as the uprising of September 2013, in which the youth played a remarkable role in facing the regime security machines, where more than 200 of them lost their lives. The new youth movement has manifested itself in many ways, including when they rallied around the late singer Mahmud Abdelaziz, who was an icon of youth rebellion against the vision of the regime and the political Islam. It is a movement of diverse backgrounds, that uses different means. The road to change is not an easy one. It is going to take a lot of effort in such a complex situation, but the mass movement and the Sudanese people in general are prepared for this journey to usher Sudan into a new error of equal citizenship, just peace and democracy.

The Building up of Resistance

The main phenomena in the present political landscape is the building up of the peaceful political resistance, from diverse forums. It has injected a new political will into the mainstream movement of resistance against the regime. It is to be noted that the youth are major players in this movement, and the professionals are making a come-back into the political scene. The medical doctors have carried out a strike for two months, in more than sixty hospitals nationwide. This movement emboldened the masses and killed the fears that were systematically planted by the regime into the minds and hearts of the people over the years. It is evident that the expectations are high, and the national congress is a spend force with nothing to offer. What is missing, is the unified mechanism that can bring together the oppositions from different backgrounds with a minimal plan of action to remove the NCP government, and bring about a new socio-economic/political dispensation that is in favor of peace, democracy, equal citizenship without discrimination and social justice. As well as

a mechanism to coordinate between the different means of struggle, and our masses in the rural marginalized areas of Sudan and the urban ones. The economic situation will continue to play a major role in bringing more social forces who are deprived from their living, into the political resistance. The new Annual budget of 2017 submitted by the minister of finance geared the bulk of the resources to the military and security sector. This was done so it can allow them to continue war and repression of the Sudanese people, indicating that the regime is going in the same old direction i.e a complete political bankruptcy. Allocating meager resources to health and education, and depending fully on taxes and price inflation of essential commodities. Therefore, change is inevitable. It is also to be noted, at this very time of crisis, the regime has been accused by Amnesty International of using chemical weapons in Darfur.

The Army and the other Regular Forces

The army and the other regular forces will eventually be forced to take a position in light of the continuing buildup of the mass movement and it would be an important factor and moment that would take things towards strengthening the chances of real change. Nevertheless, the mass movement should be cautious of a palace coup d'etat that may intend to stop the process of real change.

Position of the Regional and International Community

The political forces have continuously expressed their willingness in a peaceful settlement, and the national congress government has continually not only rejected the peaceful settlement, but continued to deliberately destroy any chance for a peaceful settlement. They are only interested in reproducing their old, ugly system. They are not interested in a new agenda of peace and democracy, and their old agenda can never bring national consensus. There is a need for a new national project, and for a new Sudan, especially after the secession of the South and the genocide against important communities. Those two events are the most critical events in the modern history of Sudan. Sudan can only bring itself together if it can correctly learn lessons from those two major events and build a new country on new parameters of our new national project, so as to bring life to our national economic sectors in the agricultural industry, national transportation of railways, river, sea, and air and avail services to the ordinary citizens, especially of water, health, education and others. We need to address the needs of the poor people, and to rehabilitate the rural areas where most of our population is, and as Late Dr. John Garang used to say, "take towns to people, not people to towns". We need to have a new nation building project that is based on democracy, and equal citizenship without discrimination, and the peaceful exchange of power. Therefore, the civil disobedience injected new blood and constitutes a chance for the region and international community to re-think their agenda on the Sudanese crisis and look for a comprehensive new agenda of peaceful settlement that will lead to ending the war, and achieve democracy simultaneously. It is important for the region and the international community to respect the will of the Sudanese people for a change, and for them to review their policies towards Sudan, which are partial and tactical, and based on narrow interests, as they have never led to peace in either parts of Sudan. It may be important to mention that the cooperation with Sudan on what is called "the Khartoum process" to prevent immigration to Europe, has not yielded the desired result, for the simple fact that the number of Sudanese immigrants, and other immigrants originating from Sudan in the last two years, is even higher than before the Khartoum process, and we can review the immigration statistics regarding Sudan in Italy, France and U.K. It is equally important to mention that general Bashir's regime has displaced, internally and externally around 6-8 million Sudanese. It would be absurd to expect him to help in preventing immigration to Europe. The biggest regards the Sudan government can pay the immigration agenda, is to end the war, along with the internal and external displacement in Sudan.

War on Terror

The Sudan government is part of the international terrorism network, which is why they are able to cooperate by giving information to some countries, and handing over some of the terrorists and it has become an investment for them; to work on one hand on terrorism, and to share information and hand over terrorists on the other. It is ridiculous to continue working with a terrorist to combat terrorism. For instance, in Libya, Sudan is helping the political Islam organization, and at the same time, offering to work with the international community to bring law and order to Libya. It is a contradiction. The correct approach should be ending the era of terrorism in Sudan, which started with the Sudanese people themselves, and effect change and transformation in Sudan, and have a new government that has nothing to do with terrorism, whose interests lie in regional and international peace and stability. Moreover, I would appeal to the Gulf States not to provide money that is going to be used to fuel internal war in Sudan and repression. The Gulf States' investment in Sudan, can only be guaranteed by the Sudanese people and not by a regime that has no future. Sudan is on the eve of change, and it is only a matter of time.

Humanitarianism before Politics

After more than 5 years, the SPLM/N leadership, rank and file, observe that Khartoum is using political engagement as a cover to continue its war and denial of access for humanitarian assistance. It is obviously clear that resolving political issues will take more time at the expense of the humanitarian situation. Therefore, the SPLM/N decided to take the humanitarian issues into the front seat, and as the only way to unlock even the political situation. Consequently, the SPLM/N decided it will never mix between the two issues again, and the priority should be in accordance with the International Humanitarian law to deliver humanitarian assistance. Humanitarianism before politics.

Rebranding the SPLM/N

The SPLM/N will continue to pursue the vision of the new Sudan, working to achieve a secular democratic Sudan. The SPLM/N understands the need to rebrand itself and develop the vision of the New Sudan, taking into consideration the new realities, including the secession of South Sudan, and the experiences that followed it. There is also a need to revisit its structural and internal democracy, along with the change that occurred all over the world, examining the failures and successes of national liberation movements and our means of struggle. As we are into the third millennium, with all its complexities, the big issues of social justice, ethnicity, the decaying of the nation state in certain aspects, and how to build a new future that addresses the nationality issues and the separation of religion from the State, remain prevalent. Additionally, it is important to bear in mind the Sudan union between two independent states in the North and South, the union process in the continent, our surroundings and the relations between the developed/developing worlds. These can only be addressed by a democratic system that will allow equal opportunities to its people, tackling the issues of women, youth, economic justice, equal citizenship without discrimination and the environment, etc. Addressing of the aforementioned, rests on the building of a modern organization that will cater for democracy, equality and justice.

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This material is distributed by Esther Sprague on behalf of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement North. Additional information is available at the Department of Justice, Washington, DC.