

SPLM-N calls on Washington to link lift of sanctions to peace and democratic reforms

February 19, 2017 (KHARTOUM) - The rebel Sudan People's Liberation Movement/North (SPLM-N) has called on the new U.S. Administration to link the full lifting of sanctions imposed on Sudan to achieving a peaceful settlement to armed conflicts and establishing transitional arrangements leading to a free, fair and internationally monitored election.



A photo extended to Sudan Tribune by the SPLM-N showing the group's chairman Mafik Agar (C), its secretary general, Yasser Arman (L), and Gen. Gagod Mukwar in Stockholm on 23 May 2015.

Last January, former President Obama signed an executive order to suspend sanctions against Sudan enabling trade and investment transactions to resume with the east African nation. The move came in recognition of Sudan's collaboration to curtail terrorism, and its efforts to improve humanitarian access to civilians in the affected conflict areas.

Within five months, Washington will review the situation and may re-establish the suspended measures, if it considers that Khartoum didn't honour its commitments. But if its finding is positive then the sanctions included in 1997 and 2006 executive orders would be definitively cancelled.

In an interview with *Sudan Tribune* Sunday, SPLM-N Secretary General Yasir Arman said "the movement is ready to meet the new U.S. Administration at any time and place if it asks us to discuss the same proposal (made by the former U.S. special envoy) or a new one on humanitarian assistance".

"We will first address the humanitarian crisis and then discuss human rights violations [by the regime] including the persecution of Sudanese Christians besides ending Khartoum links to terrorism and exportation of (illegal) migrants before to achieve a comprehensive peace," he said.

"We commit ourselves to separate between the humanitarian and political issues and we give priority to the humanitarian file, according to the International Humanitarian Law," he added.

South Kordofan and neighbouring Blue Nile states have been the scene of violent conflict between the SPLM-N and Sudanese army since 2011.

The African Union has been seeking to end the conflict for several years. However, last August, the two sides failed to sign a humanitarian cessation of hostilities agreement.

SPLM-N sticks to its demand for a humanitarian corridor through the Ethiopian border town, Asosa, to directly deliver 20% of the humanitarian aid to the civilians in the rebel-controlled areas.

But the government rejects the idea saying it is a breach of the state sovereignty and a manoeuvre from the rebels to bring arms and ammunition to their locked rebel-held areas in the Two Areas.

The former U.S. Special Envoy Donald Booth last November proposed that the USAID will deliver medical humanitarian aid to civilians in the rebel-held areas by air directly after its inspection from the government.

The SPLM-N declined the proposal insisting on its humanitarian proposal.

On Friday, Sudan Troika countries issued a statement urging the SPLM-N to swiftly accept the American proposal and facilitate the delivery of life-saving assistance to those in need in the Two Areas.

The SPLM-N chief negotiator reiterated that the SPLM-N didn't reject the American proposal, saying however they wouldn't accept it in its current form.

"Because we made four concessions on the humanitarian issue and we signed two agreements in 2012 and 2013 with the Sudanese government under the auspices of the United Nations while the government didn't make a single concession and refused to implement the two agreements," he said.

He requested the international community to not press the Movement to accept Khartoum stance, saying the latter asked Washington to deliver small portion of the assistance relating to drug shipments while leaving the whole humanitarian operation in the hands of the Sudanese government.

"It is unfair and unjust to put pressure on the movement and it is a mere repetition of the experience in Darfur," he added.

Arman pointed out that the SPLM-N is waiting to see the policy of the new U.S. Administration toward Sudan and those would be in charge of the Sudanese file.

"We call upon the new U.S. Administration to link the full lifting of sanctions to a comprehensive peace agreement that addresses the peculiarities of the war areas besides a transitional arrangements leading to a fair, free and internationally monitored elections," he said.

#### NEW APPROACH TO PEACE TALKS

Meanwhile Arman vowed to cooperate with the AU High Implementation Panel (AUHIP) Chief Thabo Mbeki, calling to adopt a new approach to achieve peace in Sudan because "the regime is not serious" in dealing with Mbeki.

"Khartoum has destroyed the Roadmap and the comprehensive national dialogue and Mbeki needs to develop a new peace process on the bases of the Roadmap to end the war and arrive at new transitional arrangements leading to free elections after 27 years of the one-party regime," he further said.

Commenting on the recent statement by Troika countries, Arman underlined that "the movement places trust in the Troika but not Khartoum and ready to work with it to resolve the outstanding issues".

"SPLM-N has [its own] experiences and interests and it represents an important force within the Sudanese society. The Troika countries need to meet with the opposition forces [to discuss the contents of the statement] because the regime doesn't accept change and only seeks to absorb us within its old cloak" he said.

The Troika statement issued by Norway, U.K. and U.S. called on the signatories of the Roadmap Agreement to conclude "comprehensive cessations of hostilities and engaging in an inclusive political dialogue".

It further called on the Sudanese government to "create an environment that is conducive to freedom of expression and political participation by both armed and unarmed opposition in Sudan".

The government and the opposition Sudan Call forces signed in March and August 2016 the Roadmap Agreement brokered by the AUHIP including several steps towards their participation in a national constitutional process inside Sudan.

However, the parties failed to sign a cessation of hostilities and humanitarian agreements that are seen crucial before to move forward in the roadmap implementation process.

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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.