

Letter from the Chairman of SPLM -N to the Sudanese Opposition Leaders on 2020 Elections

Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North (SPLM-N)

To the leaders of the Sudanese opposition forces in Sudan Call, the Sudan Revolutionary Front (SRF), the National Consensus Forces (NCF), the Broad National Front (BNF), leaders of civil society, youth, women, students, Sudanese in diaspora, internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees

Re: the importance of reaching an agreement about a clear political agenda for change, and linking national elections with the achievement of a just peace and democratic transformation.

- Our struggle lacks a clear political agenda and daily programs of work.
- We refuse to take part in the National Congress Party (NCP)'s elections. We urge all, however, to engage in constructive discussion and beyond simply boycotting the election.
- We call for a wider popular confrontation which has as its objective the conduct of a genuinely free and fair election, which unfolds in a democratic atmosphere, following the end of conflict and securing protection of basic freedoms.
- Despite our critical view of the Constitution, we stand firmly against the ruling party's attempts to amend it to allow Omer al-Bashir to remain in office for another term.

Dear leaders of opposition forces

We recently had the opportunity to engage in discussion with number of you. The purpose of those exchanges was to reach an agreement on a clear political agenda, from which we would be able to generate a program of work that would provide guidance for the opposition's everyday struggle. This came at a time in which living conditions in Sudan are constantly deteriorating; human rights violations and war have continued unabated without any sign of relief, and the totalitarian NCP regime continues to exist. The crisis created by the regime is a structural one that cannot be solved by superficial approaches such as lifting of sanctions: it is essentially an internal crisis for the country before becoming an external one.

The opposition movement has been slow, however, to get ahead of political developments to leverage the unprecedented weakness of the regime. Disputes among opposition forces have become major obstacles, preventing agreement on a common agenda for change—this sadly includes the

divisions within our movement, the SPLM-N. We need to move forward on the ground to confront the regime with a clear position and collective agenda that is based on a wide popular mobilization against the regime.

There are several emerging realities and developments, internally and externally, which need to be objectively and constructively addressed in a way that goes beyond simply demonizing others and repeating easy slogans. We need a plan of action in place to guide the confrontation with the regime and to prevent the regime's attempts to amend its constitution in order get its president, wanted by the International Criminal Court (ICC), re-elected. We truly need an objective and transparent discussion about the upcoming elections, without resort to easy positions and easy answers, that takes these new developments into account. This must be done without falling into the regime's traps which would allow the upcoming elections to become a factor which causes more divisions among opposition forces.

The question remains: how can we utilize this elections as a vehicle for change? We do not expect any opposition force to be willing to take part in the NCP-run election, which we have known very well throughout the last 28 years. At the same time, we hold the view that the election process can be an opportunity to confront the regime and to advance an agenda for change, creating space for all sectors of our people to join the confrontation. In this connection, the experience of the Egyptian uprising could be studied, particularly its relationship with elections and calls for change (KEFAYA/ Enough Campaign). Elections present a complex process: our aim is to consolidate the agenda for change, but not the regime's legitimacy. We should not rely on boycotting as the only option in dealing with the challenge posed by this election. We do have enough time before the elections that can be used to mobilize our people in order to confront the regime on a wide range of issues. We should utilize all available methods in our struggle for change, including armed struggle.

Our experience in dealing with the so-called national dialogue of the regime was very useful. We chose to engage with the international community on that issue and it gave us the opportunity to persuade the international community not to recognize the regime's pretense at discussion, as a genuine national dialogue. We also clearly demonstrated that issues relating to peace and democracy could not be resolved by such a sham exercise.

I and the SPLM-N Secretary General recently had the opportunity to take part in several meetings and to communicate with several international officials - we have disclosed the content of some of these discussions with you. I would like to share more information with you in this letter. Following an invitation from the German Government, on 17th October in Berlin, we

met with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, represented by the German Envoy to Sudan and South Sudan, the German Ambassador in Sudan, Dr Ann, head of Sudan and East Africa department in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. We also met with a working group of the Berghof Foundation. In Paris, we met with the French Envoy to Sudan and the Head of the Sudan desk in the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs. We also exchanged correspondences with the head of the Sudan desk in the United States Department of State and the office of the US Special Envoy. In November, we met the British Envoy, the Norwegian Envoy, and delegations from the Troika Countries. During all those meetings, discussions were focused on how to achieve peace and democratic transformation in Sudan.

There is no doubt that active opposition work inside the country, including both peaceful and armed resistance, is the prime mechanism which will lead to change. However, it is also crucial to simultaneously continue our engagement with the international community. We need to improve our agenda and messaging, and to convey these more effectively to foreign parliaments, the public, international organizations and to all those who stand in solidarity with the Sudanese people's cause in these countries, mobilizing both friends of Sudan, and Sudanese abroad.

During recent meetings with international actors, we have presented the following messages and concerns with respect to the upcoming elections:

1. The NCP regime has not demonstrated any willingness to change.
2. Elections are a proven mechanism for peaceful democratic transformation. In the current Sudanese political reality, however, certain considerations and measures would have to be in place for this to be a possibility. If these considerations and measures are met, we at the SPLM-N will be ready to participate in those elections. These include, but are not limited to:
 - (a) The international community must stand against the amendment of the Constitution—notwithstanding our critical view of the instrument – and against the candidacy of Omar al-Bashir
 - (b) A comprehensive peace agreement must be in place prior to elections, one that responds to the particularities of war zones, including new holistic security arrangements so that armed political movements can participate in a democratic fair and free process.
 - (c) All laws restricting basic freedoms must be repealed to facilitate a democratic environment for the election.
 - (d) A new electoral law that based on proportional representation must be agreed.

- (e) The independence and neutrality of the electoral mechanisms, including the election commission must be assured.
- (f) Effective transitional measures which ensure the neutrality of the executive branch of government and the security apparatus must be agreed in order to maintain the integrity of the elections.
- (g) There must be a guarantee that state resources will not be utilized in the interest of one of the parties to the election, and discussion and agreement on other issues related to the financing of the election.

As you know, this package of considerations and measures is not conclusive or exhaustive. It only represents an outline of themes that we can evolve together. It also reflects elements of the joint political program that we can develop for popular mobilization prior to the elections.

We need to position this election as a pillar in our political struggle. This can only occur by declaring a clear position on the election, moving away from negative boycotting, and announcing our readiness to fight it, based on an agreed platform among the opposition forces. Such a clear position can take us forward from the positions of yesterday that did not lead to the desired results. In this, we will be waging a popular and civic struggle to reclaim our right to democratic, free and fair elections as part of the broader popular struggle. We also call upon the international community to include this package of election measures in its agenda for dialogue with the government of the NCP.

Agreement on an early plan for the elections should not undermine the daily ongoing public mobilization which is intended to lead to popular uprising. A broad public struggle to secure the right to democratic, free and fair elections is one of paths to popular uprising. In this regard, we can learn from the experience of Burkina Faso and Togo. We should also support and encourage those who are struggling on the front of legal and constitutional reform. The battle for reform is also part of the struggle for change.

On the African Union Roadmap

In our meetings with main players in the international community, including the African Union High Implementation Panel, we communicated that the ruling NCP has destroyed the AU Road Map, and they should bear the full responsibility for doing so. We also stressed that the AU Road Map had linked achieving a lasting peace in Sudan with the national dialogue. The NCP has now concluded its national dialogue without achieving peace. Thus, there is an urgent need for the international community to take these new developments and realities into consideration, including considerations and measures the conduct of democratic, fair and free elections. The AU Road

Map in its old form is no longer valid: there is a need for a renewed Road Map and process that can accommodate these new realities.

Finally, we urge that major opposition groups meet as soon as possible to agree a common agenda. This agenda can pave the way for our work in stepping up popular mobilization, by all available and potential mechanisms, and to fight alongside our people by providing them with a clear agenda for the struggle, both inside and outside the country.

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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.