

Change Is the Only Game in Town for Sudan:

An Account of Current Events in Sudan

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First, let me start by expressing my appreciation for the invitation accorded to me by this august house. I am truly grateful, especially at this critical time that Sudan is passing through.

Sudan is facing multiple crises of nation-building, democratization, social justice, gender equality and the need for sustainable development. All require a paradigm shift and structural changes on the basis of a blueprint that has sufficient national consensus and will eventually lead to building a modern state on equal citizenship.

Right now, the ruling political class is bankrupt. It is abusing and looting the resources of Sudan through a parasitic model of development that ignores production, concentrates wealth into the hands of the very few, and marginalizes the massive majority of society, especially women. This situation led to the secession of South Sudan and continues to perpetuate genocide, war crimes, human rights violations, religious discrimination, etc. As a result, the answer to Sudan's future is unlikely to come from the present government. Instead, it is the responsibility of the alternative groups who are seeking change. Therefore, I will focus more on the dynamic within the opposition camp and the internal situation of the SPLM-N as an agent for change, in addition to examining the internal and external factors that are influencing the road for change and transformation.

The Economic Situation

The economic situation is the overriding factor as it is very clear that the majority of the Sudanese people are unable to earn a living in the current economic situation. Again, there is widespread corruption and the government has stopped providing services in the essential sectors of health, education, etc. The production sectors in agriculture and industry and the infrastructure are bankrupt. The wealth is in the hands of a few people who are spending the annual national budget on repressive institutions, war, the top echelon of the government, and depending on policies of taxation, literally looting the ordinary citizens, and raising the prices of essential commodities such as fuel, bread, and electricity. Above that, ongoing marginalization is creating continuous wars in the rural areas,

and the rural area itself is totally destroyed and millions of rural populations are either displaced in the urban areas or are in displaced camps, which led to the ruralization of the urban areas and destroyed the organic link between rural areas and urban areas in addition to a high degree of youth unemployment.

The government is spending a significant amount on the regular security sector and the militias. The annual budget of 2018 is the best evidence of this. Actually this annual budget is an open war against the majority of the Sudanese who are unable to continue earning their daily living under such circumstances. The current discontent and demonstrations will continue and it is widening the opposition to the regime and bringing new social forces standing against the government, especially in the urban areas of Sudan. This is one of the important characteristics of the current situation.

It is to be noted that partial and piecemeal solutions are not an answer to this situation. It has become clear, the economic crisis on its other face is a political crisis that can only be addressed by ending war in the interest of peace, allocating resources to services and development, and widening the narrow base of the ruling class through transformation and democratization. The current political class is narrow and bankrupt and is using religion as a means to keep power in its hands. They have changed the nature of the state and public institutions, including the security sector, the judiciary and others. So, the task at hand is not a change of administration, it is rather a change of the national political project.

Political Situation

The current political situation is being shaped by the inability of the government to provide solutions. At the same time, there is the lack of a concrete agenda from the opposition, despite that all of us agree on overthrowing the regime; however that is not enough alone. We need a concrete agenda that can be used on a daily basis to galvanize the mass movement in their noble resistance for their rights of having a new political system that cares about the ordinary citizen, respects human rights, achieves peace, and establishes cordial relations with the region and international community.

Opposition

Opposition and resistance against the government are wider than the official forums that are representing the political forces and civil society. Therefore, there is a need for the official opposition to reach out to many groups who are not part of the existing forums, including youth, women, students, land

owners, dam resistance groups, professionals, the displaced and refugees, Diaspora, armed groups and others. This is the only way to add new dynamics and to create a new momentum against the stagnation facing the opposition. It is also required of the existing forums to merge or coordinate effectively together on the basis of a minimal agenda and to agree on concrete steps and mechanism to widen and deepen the resistance, thinking outside the box and not shying away from examining new tools of struggle and addressing new realities. It is important for the opposition to review critically their past experience and for them to ask the fundamental question, "Why does this ugly regime continue to exist despite the huge sacrifices over the last 28 years?" The opposition should be ready to accept criticism and to go into a process of renewal, sharpening their tools to give fresh answers to the new question of the day.

SPLM-N

The SPLM-N came into being at a very critical time when South Sudan seceded and the government in Khartoum tried immediately to crush the new movement, and at a time of formidable changes inside and outside of Sudan. A new question emerged in regard to the vision of the New Sudan after the secession of the South and in regard to critical issues of armed struggle, self determination, etc. The SPLM-N is fighting in the strongholds of the Nuba Mountains/South Kordofan and Blue Nile. This raises questions of whether the SPLM-N will cut and paste the South Sudan agenda and solution; whether it is going to struggle for a new, united, secular Sudan or self determination for the Two Areas; or whether it is going to look for a comprehensive solution or a piecemeal peace agreement. Those questions were raised as early as the time of the establishment of the movement itself, and they continue to haunt the SPLM-N in a changing environment inside Sudan, the region and the international community.

The movement did not have the external support that was available in the environment of 1983 and onward into the second war in 2011. There is a general deterioration and backtracking from the agenda of national liberation movements worldwide. The armed struggle, despite its importance, is not as relevant as it used to be in the '60's and '80's. Again, the question of the importance of using soft power in linking the armed struggle in the rural areas to the urban political peaceful struggle to achieve total transformation is apparently a major question.

When it comes to the question of self determination, the ethnic composition and the history of the Two Areas is largely different from South Sudan. In addition, the SPLM-N would not get the support accorded by the regional and international communities to the question of South Sudan with regard to

the Two Areas. This complex situation plus other factors led to the split within the SPLM-N. From our point of view, the SPLM-N needs a process of renewal in terms of vision, mission and structures, including establishing a well respected tradition of a peaceful exchange of power within the movement and the need to have a new leadership annually that allows youth and women to have strong voices in the affairs of the movement. As we are looking for an equal citizenship, we should also have equal rights for all members regardless of their religion, gender or social background.

The vision of the New Sudan, in its totality, is the most important vision addressing the issues of nation building since 1983, yet this vision needs a breakdown of well articulated programs to govern Sudan democratically. It is not enough to hide behind big slogans without spelling out a clear program that would address the social, economic, cultural, and political questions in a new dispensation. The good news is that the SPLM-N, together with scholars and experts in different fields, has worked tirelessly for four years, and we have obtained a detailed program that can act as a day after agenda.

Again, the SPLM-N meanwhile is very concerned of the national domination and nationality question and should deepen its concern of issues of social justice and the economic roots of marginalization. In addition, it must continue to create a strategic alliance with the New Sudan forces and the current political alliances with the opposition in general. The SPLM-N, as part of the national liberation movements, needs to study carefully why many national liberation movements have failed and why many of them ended contrary to the slogans they raised, including examining critically our own experience and the experience in the developing countries. Africa is facing difficult questions, including the backtracking from Pan Africanism and the unity of Africa and its individual states. How can we address the issue of self determination without dividing Africa and weakening the African position in the international context, which is not favorable to Africa and the developing countries in general as they are at the receiving end. In a nutshell, the New Sudan vision needs a new birth, and the unity of the SPLM-N is of paramount importance.

The Islamic Movement

The Islamic movement in Sudan is responsible for the current crisis of the country, especially the faction in the front seat ruling Sudan currently. They committed unprecedented crimes and mistakes including genocide and the secession of the South. They need to change or be changed. Their situation is more or less similar to the national party of South Africa during apartheid. Despite the goodwill from the Sudanese people, they have failed to rise to

the standard of de Clerk in South Africa. The Islamic movement will continue to play a significant role if they can only accept change and accountability and to look for a discourse that will fit within democratic parameters and a peaceful exchange of power. The Islamic movement should accept that the best system that political Islam can produce is what has taken place in Sudan, and they should accept in one way or another a formula of separating religion from the state to provide for equal citizenship.

Mechanisms for Change

Uprising: An uprising is a great possibility despite repression and the lack of the full unity of the opposition, which is key for success and to achieve its objective. Sudan has witnessed uprisings in 1964 and 1985 that overthrew two dictatorships. The current situation is complex in many ways, but that does not overrule the possibility of an uprising. It is worth mentioning, the ruling Islamists acquired wealth, arms, media and press, and they are controlling the public institutions including the security sector and the judiciary. They will continue to play a negative role before and after an uprising. This must be handled carefully and concretely by the opposition and those who are aspiring for an uprising. Again, we should recognize the new dynamics in the urban areas' population composition, including the withdrawal of the significant role of the middle class in the urban areas. The middle class was one of the key factors in the two previous uprisings. The urban areas are socially divided and ethnically diverse more than ever before; and there is a need for great political effort to bring urban populations together in a common political agenda and platforms.

2020 Elections: Transformation can indeed come through an uprising or a peace agreement or a national constitutional dialogue or an election. Given the current situation and the mediation by the AUHIP, the idea was to stop the war and to have a genuine political process through a national constitutional dialogue; and despite that, the roadmap is the only agreement that was signed by the opposition and the government and witnessed by the African Union and the international community, while the government went ahead and finished its national dialogue. That development requires an alternative political process to update the AUHIP process.

The elections of 2020 constitute another opportunity to provide a democratic environment to be created ahead of 2020 elections. This would definitely mean rejecting any amendments to the constitution, and General Omar al Bashir should not be allowed to contest the election again in 2020 after 30 years of dictatorial rule. It will mean also ending wars through peace agreements and creating a democratic environment and freedoms that will allow the opposition to effectively participate, plus other steps. No one from

the opposition, and especially the SPLM-N, would be ready to participate in the elections under the current conditions and business as usual. We need an election that will lead to change and transformation. The status quo will never bring peace and democracy. This proposal regarding the 2020 election is forwarded by the SPLM-N and it is enjoying support from others. It has created a wider debate within the opposition rank and file. It is not a final proposal, it is subject to more debate and to be developed, and we are open to debate with our colleagues in the opposition. We are also open to listening to any better alternative. At the same time, we will continue to work with those who welcomed this proposition.

Peace Negotiations: Peace negotiations are essential to address the particularities of the war zones and areas as to achieve a new security arrangement and to ensure equal citizenship and social justice within a wider national context. I would like to make some observations in this regard. Piecemeal solutions have never worked before and they will not work now either. There is a need for a comprehensive peaceful settlement as well as to organically link democratization with a peaceful settlement. The experience shows that without democratization, there is no sustainable peace.

With regard to the current division within the SPLM-N, the mediation and the international community should take seriously that the peace process should include both factions and it should be inclusive and on the basis of the UN Security Council Resolution 2046 and the African Union's subsequent resolutions, and based on the documents that were reached by the two parties and the mediations and in particular, the Framework and cessation of hostilities documents. Trying to isolate any of the parties will repeat the past experience in Abuja and elsewhere. It is an encouragement for the continuation of war, and it will create a great doubt on the process itself. Our side in the SPLM-N is ready to provide new ideas of how to work together with our colleagues in the other factions and the mediations, especially given the necessity of breaking the impasse on the humanitarian situation.

It is worth mentioning that also on this side of the SPLM-N, we are not looking for a power or wealth sharing that will include the elites from the warring faction in the status quo and we are looking for a situation that will ensure that power and wealth sharing is designed for the empowerment of the ordinary marginalized people rather than the elites. We are no longer interested in sharing the power with the present government. We are interested in permanent and sustainable peace.

Sudan Foreign Relations and Changing Dynamics

Since Sudan has cut its diplomatic ties with Iran, participated in the Yemeni war, and went into a process of normalization with Europe and the U.S., which lifted sanctions on Sudan, the idea was that Sudan is moving into a new foreign relations track. On the side of the opposition, we have always been consistent that Sudan will never change its policy outside if it has not changed its policy inside Sudan itself. The need for peace and democracy and the respect of human rights are inseparable of its foreign attitude. It didn't take long when General Bashir and his group realized the need to change inside, including that many colleagues of General Bashir within his rank and file are seeing him as a liability, wanted by the ICC. They feel they can only be accepted fully by the international community if they can get rid of General Bashir. The general feeling is that he is a liability to them.

The process of normalization between Sudan and the outside world created new dynamics inside Sudan that made General Bashir quickly end the honeymoon of normalization or rather the normalization should be on his own terms, meaning that he should continue ruling Sudan after 2020 and after more than 30 years. That also is going side by side with a division within the ruling class on the Bashir question. Bashir is making new realignments inside and outside of Sudan. Outside Sudan, he visited Russia as a Security Council member, to depend on them against other Security Council members. General Bashir doesn't take seriously the geopolitical difference between Syria and Sudan. Again, he revived his strong ties with Turkey, Qatar and Sudan. That was marked by the meeting of the chiefs of the armies of the three countries, which is a signal that the alliance includes military and security issues. He also gave a Sudanese island in the Red Sea to be administered by Turkey, which is a serious message to Saudi Arabia and other regional countries. New indications have been identified that General Bashir is reviving relations with Iran and working with Turkey, Qatar and Libya as well as supporting the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood. This new dynamic change is at the expense of internal and external peace and stability, and it is organically linked to the internal situation in Sudan. General Bashir is hunted and is scared of the ICC, and he believes that sticking to power is the only protection for him, especially since he tested the will of the international community since he was indicted and he believes he can stay in power.

Immigration, Fighting Terrorism, Trade and Investment with Sudan

It is our conviction that the Sudan government can only effectively participate in combating illegal immigration by addressing the root causes of migration inside Sudan and ending war and displacement to its own citizens inside and outside of Sudan. It is enough to mention that 6 million Sudanese, a United Nations statistic, are internally and externally displaced,

which makes them potential immigrants. As far as Sudan continues to be a source of instability in Libya, South Sudan and other countries, it will never help in countering terrorism. Terrorism is part of the vision and mission of the Sudan government currently and throughout the last decades.

When it comes to trade and investment and lifting the debts of Sudan, it will require a healthy environment inside Sudan, and it will require the Sudan government to refrain from war crimes and religious persecution, and to respect human rights, end wars, and continue to normalize with the outside world while transforming the inside condition, especially since Sudan is still on the list of states sponsoring terrorism and the president is wanted by the ICC.

It is worth mentioning that the British Parliament has taken important resolutions when it comes to Sudan, and we deeply appreciate the APPGS report on Sudan, which is well articulated and detailed. Given all these factors, Sudan can only create an investment with the UK and Europe in general by changing the current environment and achieving peace and democracy. As I am talking in the UK and given the historical relations between the two countries and the significant presence of Sudanese in the UK, especially the professionals, I believe it will require more effort from the UK with regard to Sudan. We do appreciate the involvement of the British Special Envoy in the peace and democratization process in Sudan. We equally believe that the UK, Troika and Europe need a benchmark that is linked to achieving peace and democratization in Sudan as a requirement of the normalization process with the Sudan government as well as a coherent policy towards Sudan.

Lastly, tomorrow, 18 of January, is the commemoration day of the hero and martyr of conscience, Ustaz Mahmoud Mohammed Taha, the leader of the Republican Brotherhood who was persecuted by the dictator Jafar Nimiri on the eve of the 1985 uprising, and therefore, I dedicate this presentation to him.

Once again, thank you.

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.