

February Negotiations In Addis Ababa Are Part Of The Sudan Government's Strategy Of A Piecemeal 2

We have heard that the AU High-Level Implementation Panel (AUHIP) chaired by President Mbeki has invited the Government of Sudan and one of the SPLM/N factions to meet for a new round of peace talks in Addis Ababa on 1 February.

The Executive Leadership of the SPLM/N met yesterday to discuss this urgent matter of concern to the Sudanese people and the people of the Two Areas in particular. They agreed that:

The idea of inviting only one faction of the SPLM/N to the peace talks in Addis contradicts the principle of inclusivity and is a format that has been imposed by the Government of Sudan. This is why the news is being celebrated today in the state-run media;

Delinking the issues of the Two Areas from the national dimension is part of the Government of Sudan's long-term strategy to seek a piecemeal solution to Sudan's conflicts which has been resisted by the SPLM/N leadership for the last seven years over 15 rounds of talks. This approach will not achieve a durable solution for the people of the Two Areas or Sudan.

It is contrary to United Nations Security Council resolution 2046 and African Union Peace and Security Council Resolutions 456 and 539 which call for a holistic approach to resolve Sudan's conflicts in the context of a comprehensive national process which addresses Sudan's challenges, including the challenge of democratisation. This approach was articulated by President Mbeki in the African Union Panel on Darfur's report (adopted by the African Union Peace and Security Council on 29 October 2009), whose analysis has been the foundation of the African Union's policy on Sudan. It also contradicts the Road Map Agreement signed by the Government of Sudan and Sudan Call Forces in 2016.

This round of peace talks in Addis is particularly untimely because it coincides with a wave of protests across Sudan, triggered by a huge hike in the price of bread and other basic commodities which places an intolerable burden on the poor. Though demonstrations have been peaceful in nature, they have been met with violence and repression by the Government of the national congress, including a massacre in the Hasahisa IDP camp in Darfur and the arrest of hundreds of activists, women, students, journalists and opposition leaders, including prominent leaders such as

Omar Degair, the Chairman of the Sudanese Congress Party, Mohamed Mukhtar Al-Khatib, Secretary-General of the Sudanese Communist Party, Mohamed al Douma, Vice-Chairman of the National Umma Party and Sara Nugdallah, Secretary-General of the National Umma Party. The priority for the AUHIP now should be to speak out against this repression and demand the release of all those detained in connection with the current protests. The African Union should not reward the Government of Sudan by treating them as if they were searching for peace at a time when they are taking such repressive actions.

The African Union has extended invitations to two prominent leaders of the Sudan Call when one of them is in prison ! We call upon the African Union to secure the release of Sudan Call leaders and others first before calling them to a meeting.

The message being sent by the AUHIP by inviting only one of the SPLM/N factions is that those who do not have sufficient arms should look for more arms if they want to be seated at the negotiating table. This message is loud and clear. It is exactly what General Bashir has been telling the Sudanese people: we came by force and whoever wants to negotiate with us needs to have equal force.

A piecemeal solution will not and cannot address the issue of the Two Areas. Fundamental issues such as equal citizenship and land and resources cannot be solved in Kadugli. They can only be solved in Khartoum.

While we appreciate the efforts of the AUHIP and international community, we would emphasise that the Road Map Agreement is no longer based any credible political process. The Road Map Agreement was meant to enable Sudanese political forces to participate effectively in a genuine and inclusive National Dialogue. But General Bashir closed down the Government's National Dialogue almost before the ink had dried. The Government of Sudan is therefore responsible for undermining the Road Map Agreement.

The SPLM/N insisted on a comprehensive solution throughout 15 rounds of talks. there is a danger that the next round of talks in Addis will now undo all these efforts and enable the Government of Sudan to maintain the status quo. It is clear that the Government's aim is to sign a cessation of hostilities agreement that will enable them to implement the outcome of their National Dialogue through a constitutional process and hence to buy time until the next elections.

Yet if negotiations are limited to only one of the SPLM/N factions, this will not even result in a comprehensive cessation of hostilities in the Two Areas as one of the SPLM/N factions is on the ground but not at the table. Moreover, the cessation of hostilities will not include Darfur. This partial approach is consistent with the Government of Sudan's claim that there is no longer a war in Darfur and its efforts to drive a wedge both within the SPLM/N and between the armed struggle movements.

The SPLM/N appreciates the statement by Mohamed Zakariah, the spokesman of

the Sudan Revolutionary Front led by Minni Minawi, that they will not meet the Government of Sudan in current circumstances, especially until all political detainees are released. We equally appreciate the statement by Mohamed Farouq on behalf of the Sudan Call Forces Inside Sudan that, given the current situation, they will not accept any invitation to negotiate with the Government and that the priority now is to stop repression and release political prisoners.

Finally, our message to President Mbeki and to the regional and international community is that they need to look for a new approach that will bring a comprehensive peace settlement and democratisation to Sudan. It is high time to end the suffering of the Sudanese people. Sudanese political forces and civil society will no longer accept the status quo as it cannot bring peace and democracy. We therefore call on the AUHIP to take its responsibilities seriously on the basis of the relevant AUPSC resolutions, to call for the release of all political detainees and to hold genuine consultations with all Sudanese political forces and civil society instead of proceeding with business as usual and convening peace talks designed to achieve a piecemeal solution.

Malik Agar Eyre
Chairman
Sudan People's Liberation Movement/North
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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.