

And when ye go forth in the land, it is no sin for you to curtail (your) worship if ye fear that those who disbelieve may attack you. In truth the disbelievers are an open enemy to you.

Surah An-Nisa — 4, Verse — 101

Mediawatch

Blair's African adventure

Despite a military coup last month, the tiny west African state of Togo is to hold democratic elections on April 24. Togo's five million people will finally have a chance to determine their future in the wake of the dictatorship of Gnassingbe Eyadema, who died in February after nearly 40 years in power.

This turnabout came suddenly. An army-backed power grab by the late ruler's son, Faure Gnassingbe, was reversed after the Economic Community of West African States (Ecowas), supported by the African Union, imposed sanctions and demanded that the constitution be upheld.

Mr Gnassingbe stepped down. He will now seek the presidency via the ballot box as the ruling party candidate.

Kofi Annan, the UN secretary general, was among many who welcomed this African solution to an African crisis. "We have demonstrated a capacity to solve our own problems," an Ecowas spokesman said. Diplomats and analysts enthused that Togo was further evidence that mutually reinforced standards of good governance were taking root in Africa.

Concerns persist over the poll's fairness. A prominent opposition leader, Gilchrist Olympio, is barred from standing. And ongoing demonstrations by opposing "white" and "red" factions could bring more violence. All the same, in the week that Tony Blair's Africa commission will lay out an ambitious road map for the continent's renewal, Togo might be taken as a good omen. The African leaders' stand could encourage other G8 countries to back the UK-initiated aid and debt relief targets.

Other news from Africa this week provides a less optimistic context for the commission's report, showing how daunting the challenges are in what Mr Blair has called a "make-or-break" year. On the ground, the gulf between aspirations and delivery still yawns wide. And as ever, the UN is playing piggy in the middle.

In Sudan, long-running efforts involving African and western lead-

ers have failed to stop killings and associated genocidal atrocities in Darfur, according to the latest UN field reports.

Officials estimate that up to four million Sudanese will need emergency aid by this summer. Meanwhile, the UN says more than \$1bn is required for the first year of a planned, 10,000-strong peacekeeping mission in southern Sudan. It is unclear where the money will come from. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, entrenched problems may be getting worse. The UN said this week that it was still trying "to contain the situation in a very troublesome and unsettled area" after nine peacekeepers and about 50 militiamen were killed in fighting in Ituri district, disrupting the distribution of aid.

In anarchic Somalia, 14 years into a civil war, the UN wants a bigger international effort to enforce an arms embargo. Volunteers for a proposed peacekeeping force there are hard to find. In Ethiopia up to 7.2 million will need food aid this year. In Zimbabwe, unchecked misrule and another food emergency form the backdrop to elections this month that the ruling party looks poised to steal. In Kenya, the anti-corruption campaign has run into the sand. Nor is West Africa out of the woods, despite Togo's good example and high profile western and AU interventions in recent years.

Speaking last week, Ahmedou Ould-Abdallah, the UN's special representative, warned of the continuing "fragility of peace and stability" in the region as a whole.

Of particular concern are Sierra Leone, Liberia and Ivory Coast, where UN peacekeeping missions are battling to overcome the legacy of society-shattering upheavals. But lack of funding for reintegration and democracy building is a problem everywhere, Mr Ould-Abdallah said. Stronger international support is needed.

Which is where Mr Blair's commission comes in, pledging practical steps for a new beginning. In Darfur and elsewhere, Africans will wait to see whether it is just another broken promise.

The Guardian, March 8, 2005

Sudan's chance for peace

BY FAUZIA QURESHI

In the past, those who foolishly sought power by riding on the back of the tiger ended up inside. - John F Kennedy.

Sudan has been torn by internal wars for a very long time. In January, this year, in Nairobi, Kenya, the Sudanese government entered into a comprehensive peace agreement between the north and south, to end five decades of civil war. This peace agreement had the blessings of the international community. The Sudanese parliament unanimously ratified this peace deal that the government had signed with the southern rebels. However, the US has time and again, called for sanctions against Sudan with respect to the region of Darfur. What repercussions are sanctions going to have at this crucial juncture? Why does the US want to impose sanctions to the already war ravaged country? Should the world not give a chance to the Sudanese government to settle its internal problems?

Wars have ravaged Sudan since the country's independence from Great Britain in 1956. The colonial power in order to achieve their interest planted the seeds of discord by using the racial and cultural diversity through applying the golden colonial principle of divide and rule. The British introduced and legalised 'Closed Areas Act', which made the areas of south Sudan, Nuba Mountains and south Blue Nile a kind of isolated racial and tribal settlement, in a way that was not to be affected by prevailing Arab and Islamic culture in other areas of the Sudan.

These areas were then open to missionary and church activities that assumed the affairs of different education and cultural evolution in these areas. After independence from Britain, some southern intellectuals complained of injustice inflicted by the north Sudan on the south. As a result of which, they formed political rebel movements with military branches intermittently. Two big wars from 1956 to 1972, and 1983 to 2002 were fought between the north and the south. These guerilla wars caused loss of human lives, hindrance of substantial resources and retarded the efforts for development in the country for more than five decades.

The cost in displaced persons was also unaccountable.

The government of Sudan, mindful of the fact that the conflict in the country is the longest running conflict in Africa, which has not only destroyed the infrastructure of the country but caused horrendous loss of life, wasted economic resources, became sensitive to historical injustices and to investigate Darfur has concluded

and the Sudanese government. This resulted in the signing of a 'permanent ceasefire' on 31st of December, 2004, by signing the last two protocols regarding the modalities of implementation of the peace agreement based on the premise of sharing power and wealth.

On the 9th of January, 2005, the final peace agreement was signed in Nairobi, in the presence of representatives of the international community to usher a new era of peace and development in Sudan. The chief architects of this historic deal were Vice President Ali Osman Taha, representing the Sudanese government led by President Omar al-Bashir, and General John Garang, the veteran leader of the main southern rebel group, the SPLA. This historic deal is unique in several ways.

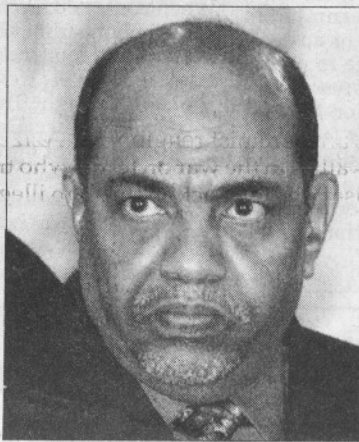
Firstly, it has the blessings of all political parties in Sudan, like the popular Umma party of Sadiq al-Mahdi (with little reservation) and the Democratic Alliance, fully. Secondly, this peace agreement involves the African Union and the International Community. The International Partners Forum comprising the US, UK, Norway, Italy, Netherlands, Sweden and Italy are all party to it. Thirdly, this peace deal is the most comprehensive, all encompassing and fair agreement which sets an example for all the countries of the world. Under the agreement, Sudan is to become a federal state for a transitional period of six years.

At the end of which, the south will decide by referendum either to choose secession and self-determination, or to remain inside the united Sudan. John Garang will be the vice president, and his party members will sit in the new Parliament along with the members from the north. Even, power and oil revenues will be shared evenly between the north and south.

However, the International Community stresses that the peace deal between north and south Sudan would be baseless without the settlement of the Darfur region. The US is the most ardent supporter of this idea. The US is the only country which has termed the ongoing conflict in Darfur as genocide. Today, when America talks of genocide it

seems frivolous. Has the world forgotten Vietnam? What about the current atrocities being committed in Iraq, Afghanistan and not to forget Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo?

Recently, Kofi Annan has been asked either to deal with the region of Darfur or resign, even though the UN commission pushed by the US



resources, became

sensitive to historical injustices and inequalities and took a bold step to redress. The National Salvation Revolution (NSR) came into existence, which made the peace issue its foremost priority. A first ceasefire was agreed in October 2002. Two years of laborious negotiations followed in which the NSR of Sudan played an important role. It openly resolved to put an end to the ongoing devastating war in southern Sudan.

Many sincere and significant attempts were made by the government of Sudan with the SPLM/ SPLA(Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Sudan People's Liberation Army). The Machakos Protocol of July 2002, signed in Kenya, is the most pertinent example of Sudanese government's efforts under the auspices of the IGAD Peace Process. It was here that the three parties met from 18th June, 2002 through 31st January, 2004, and reiterated their commitment to a negotiated, peaceful, comprehensive resolution to the Sudan conflict. Member states of the IGAD Sub-Committee on Sudan included Djibouti, Eritrea, Kenya, Ethiopia and Uganda.

The Machakos Protocol provided a broad framework, which set forth the principles of governance, the general procedures to be followed during the transitional process and the structures of government to be created under legal and constitutional arrangements. A specific agreement on the right of self-determination for the people of southern Sudan, on the relation between state and religion was also reached. Representatives of the US, UK, Norway and Italy have signed as grantors of the peace agreement as well as the Arab League, the UN and the African Union.

The government of Sudan fully affirmed the fact that Sudan being a multi-religious, multi-racial, and multi-cultural society, religion was not to be used as a divisive factor. Though, Islam is the religion of the majority. The unity, solidarity and sovereignty of Sudan was affirmed and upheld by the government of Sudan in all respects. According to the Machakos Protocol, the religious beliefs of the parties concerned were to be respected by all. The constitution of the Republic of Sudan also upholds the rights, duties, freedom and values of the nation.

It is affirmed in the constitution that Sudan is a universal homeland in which different races and cultures are to associate in harmony. Discrimination based on sex, religion or race is prohibited. The efforts by the respective government of Sudan and various African nations culminated in the six protocols of Naivasha (Kenya) agreed upon by the SPLM

to investigate Darfur has concluded that Khartoum has not pursued a policy of genocide against non-Arabs in the region as wrongly portrayed by the media. Unfortunately, the role of Mr Kofi Annan has also been very biased (Pro-American), regarding the resolution of the Sudanese problem. This has further cast doubt on the credibility of the UN, which is looked upon as a 'US sweeping mop' and Mr Annan himself, after the oil for food scam involving him and his son. It is interesting to note that the US itself is reluctant to refer the matter to the International Criminal Court (ICC), in The Hague, which might one day, try US war crimes. Washington has instead proposed a new UN-African tribunal to be set up in Tanzania, a proposal rejected by Algeria and China - which back Sudan's call for its own domestic trials.

Today, Sudan still remains on the US list of state sponsors of terrorism. It faces sanctions from the US which could only worsen the peace efforts of the present Sudanese government. The Sudanese government has already started to negotiate with the rebels from Darfur under the auspices of the African Union in Abuja, Nigeria and in Chad to end the conflict and hopefully this region will soon return to peace. The people of Sudan have enough problems at hand like the Beja Community of Eastern Sudan. The government of Sudan admits the fact that Eastern Sudan is one of the marginalised region and expresses willingness to solve the problem. The Sudanese government has decided to establish a forum of negotiations to reach a peaceful settlement of this issue. Like every nation, the people of Sudan would like to solve their problems themselves.

There is no doubt that the Sudanese people have suffered for a long time. They are still trying to establish peace and get rid of the colonial legacy which had sown the seeds of discontent among them. Imposing sanctions or international military intervention would not help the Sudanese people in any way as the experience in Afghanistan and Iraq project. A spirit of compromise and restraint is needed at this important juncture. This is the time that the Sudanese people need to be encouraged to come out of their problems by the International Community especially when the Government of Sudan is very much co-operative to find a negotiated settlement to all conflicts. Time and again, the Sudanese government has reiterated its will and determination to solve the conflicts through negotiations. So, let the people of Sudan decide their own destiny and let peace take its natural course.