

Return of peace to Sudan

By Tayyab Siddiqui

Africa
Daily
11/1/05

WHILE international attention is riveted on the Tsunami disaster, a hopeful and significant development is taking place in Sub-Saharan Africa that may prove a watershed in the contemporary history of the continent.

Sudan, the largest and poorest country in Africa, is on the threshold of a new beginning. The unfortunate country that has been ravaged for decades both by famine and civil war is finally heading towards a promising future, thanks to an agreement reached recently to end the civil war that has rendered this potentially rich country a basket case.

The civil war has raged for 21 years in the south of Sudan, principally between the Christian and animists in the south against the Khartoum government of Arab Muslims accused of economic neglect of the region and the draconian Shariah laws enforced by the regime of Jafar Numeiri in 1982.

The war erupted in 1983 and has since been fought with incredible brutality claiming two million lives and displacing another four million. While religion was the primary catalyst, the discovery of oil in 1999 changed the complexion of the conflict and led to direct involvement of outside powers.

Earlier the neighbouring countries, Ethiopia and Uganda were provided \$20 million military equipment by the US to topple the government of Sudan. The rebels in the south led by Col. John Garang and his SPLA (Sudan People's Liberation Army) were also regular recipients of substantial military and political support which sustained the civil war for 22 years.

Sudan is reported to have three billion barrels reserves and produces 350,000 barrels per day, earning \$1 billion in oil rev-

ity and to build a prosperous and united Sudan." The Resolution required Sudan to abide by the preliminary accords negotiated in Kenya, including the formation of a coalition government, an integrated military and a sharing of oil revenues to be included in the final peace deal.

The final peace deal concluded on December 31 was formally signed on Sunday. This development has offered tantalizing prospects of peace and development in this unfortunate land which has known only violence and hunger for the last 50 years. It has been a painful compromise by both sides.

Khartoum has made significant concessions on sharing the oil revenues equally and 30 per cent of administrative posts in the transitional setup and vice-presidency for six months. On its part, the SPLA has renounced its demand for independence and also agreed to limited autonomy, the future of which will be decided by a plebiscite in 2011.

Khartoum has agreed to withdraw its troops numbering 90,000 from the territory within two and a half years. The Shariah laws will not apply to non-Muslims in the south and the constitution will be suitably amended.

There are optimistic assessments of the salubrious impact on Sudan's economy, particularly in the oil sector which has suffered due to war and US sanctions. President Bashir of Sudan has demonstrated great statesmanship by making appropriate concessions to ward off the menacing pressure from the US. However, the Darfur issue is still unresolved and can ignite to nullify the current peace accord. Perhaps the agreement with SPLA could be replicated to defuse the situation in Darfur.

The Darfur crisis surfaced in February 2003, with a rebellion by the animists against the Arab tribes, known as Janjaweed and

enues. By next year, it is expected to double, thanks to rising prices of oil. The oil factor has changed the dimensions of the conflict, inviting rivalry between China and the US, China being the largest investor in the oil industry. The US imposed sanctions on Sudan, declaring it a 'state sponsor of terrorism,' and also opposed supply of weaponry by Russia and China.

While the civil war raged on, there were peacemaking efforts by the Organization of African States from time to time. These efforts have failed both because of inability of the mediators to play a decisive role and the outside interference for political and economic domination.

Rebel leader Garang and Sudan's vice president Taha finally met in 2002 in Nairobi and signed six protocols covering issues relating to political power and wealth sharing. These documents became the basis of a comprehensive ceasefire and eventually peaceful settlement covering security arrangements and positioning of various forces.

The failure of the African Union to enforce the Nairobi accords led to the UNSC intervention. To convey the sense of urgency, the Security Council decided to hold the session in Nairobi — the fourth to be held outside New York since 1952.

The SC proposed Resolution 1574 urging the two parties to conclude two years of talks with a comprehensive peace accord by December 31, '04. Massive economic aid, including possible debt relief, was promised to ensure "lasting peace and stabil-

The final deal concluded on December 31 and formally signed on Sunday offers tantalizing prospects of peace and development to Sudan which has known only violence and hunger for the last 50 years.

supported by Khartoum. The UN has threatened oil sanctions unless the situation is controlled. It is alleged that 1.5 million people have been driven from their homes and more than 50,000 killed by violence, hunger and disease. The US has accused Sudan of 'genocide' in Darfur and warned it of the consequences.

Sudan has to steer its course with great dexterity and diplomacy and not let vested powers deny it peace and development any longer on the pretext of Darfur situation. Oil and religion are a lethal mix and Sudan has to ensure that neither provides a pretext to outside powers to render the peace agreement with SPLA, a pyrrhic victory.

The writer is a former ambassador of Pakistan.