

# Sudan's chance for peace

Africa

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*"In the past, those who foolishly sought power by riding on the back of the tiger ended up inside."*

— John F. Kennedy

**S**UDAN has been torn by internal wars for a very long time. In January, the Sudanese government entered into a comprehensive peace agreement with southern rebels in Nairobi to end five-decade old civil war. The agreement had the blessings of the International Community. The Sudanese parliament unanimously ratified the peace deal.

However, the US has, time and again, called for sanctions against Sudan with respect to the situation in Darfur region. What can be the repercussions of sanctions at this crucial juncture? Why does the US want sanctions against the already war ravaged country? Should the world not give a chance to the Sudanese government to settle its internal problems?

Sudan is the largest country in Africa with an area of 2.5 million kms. The estimated population is now 31 million, the majority being Muslims along with a minority of Christians and pagans, mostly in the southern states. There are nearly 597 tribes which descend from about 56 Arab and African groupings.

Wars have ravaged Sudan since the country's independence from Great Britain in 1956. The colonial power planted the seeds of discord by applying the rule of divide and rule. The British introduced and legalized '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 it was not to be affected by prevailing Arab and Islamic culture in other areas of the Sudan.

These areas were then laid open to missionary and church groups which promoted different education and culture in these areas. So, soon after independence, some southern intellectuals complained of injustices perpetrated by the north Sudan on the south. As a result, there sprang up political rebel movements. Two big wars — from 1956 to 1972, and 1983 to 2002 — were fought between the north and the south, causing huge

loss of human lives and frustrating efforts for development.

The Government of Sudan, mindful of the deadly impact of the longest running conflict in Africa on the country's infrastructure, took a bold step. The National Salvation Revolution (NSR) came into existence, which made the peace issue its foremost priority. A ceasefire was agreed in October 2002. Two years of laborious negotiations followed in which the National Salvation Revolution of Sudan played an important role. Many significant attempts were made by the government to end war 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 outstanding example of Sudanese government's serious efforts under the auspices of the IGAD peace process. It was here that the three parties met from June 18, 2002 to January 31, 2004, to seek a negotiated, peaceful, comprehensive resolution of 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 relations between the state and religion was also reached. Representatives of the US, UK, Norway and Italy signed as guarantors of the peace agreement. The Arab League, the UN and the African Union also signed it.

The government of Sudan fully affirmed the fact that since Sudan is a multi-religious, multi-racial, multi-ethnic and multi-cultural society, religion was not to be used as a divisive factor. 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 homeland of different races and cultures and that discrimination based on sex, religion or race is prohibited.

The prolonged talks produced six protocols of Naivasha (Kenya) agreed upon by the SPLM and the Sudanese government. Then, a protocol was signed leading to 'permanent ceasefire' on December 31, 2004. The last two protocols related to modalities of implementation of the peace agreement based on the premise of sharing power and wealth. On January 9, 2005, the final peace agreement was signed in Nairobi, in the presence of representatives of the international community to usher in 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 such as the popular Umma party of Sadiq al-Mahdi and the Democratic Alliance. Secondly, this peace agreement involves the African Union and the US, UK, Norway, Italy, Netherlands, Sweden and Italy and they are all a party to it. Thirdly, it is a comprehensive agreement which sets an example for other countries.

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 through a referendum either to choose secession or self-determination, or to remain within 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 would be meaningless without a settlement of the Darfur issue. 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. ■