

Post-Referendum Sudan

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Post-Referendum Sudan

National and Regional Questions

Edited by

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CODESRIA

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Foreword

Peace is Better than Unity

Peter Adwok Nyaba

‘Peace is better than unity’, was the slogan with which the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) came to power in Addis Ababa in May 1991. Notwithstanding the unfortunate hostilities that later emerged between Ethiopia and Eritrea, the Ethiopian leaders have been vindicated by opting for peace rather than prolong war in order to maintain the territorial integrity of the country.

Contemporary history reveals that the territorial integrity of any country or the unity of its peoples cannot be imposed by force of arms. The era of imperialism and local despots has gone forever. Sudan had been a colonial construct since 1899 when the conquering Anglo-Egyptian forces re-occupied northern Sudan and extended their rule southwards and westwards to engulf southern Sudan and Darfur respectively. It will be recalled that ‘Equatoria’ was until 1910 part of the ‘Lado Enclave’ under the Belgian crown, while Darfur was annexed to the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan in 1916 after the defeat of Sultan Ali Dinar.

Independent Sudan (1956) had the opportunity to remain one stable and prosperous country. But the ruling political elite remained oblivious to the country’s multiple diversities. It insisted on defining the country along the two parameters of Arab and Islamic orientations. The policy to construct a highly centralised state based on these parameters precipitated civil wars initially in southern Sudan and then in other parts of northern Sudan, notably southern Kordofan, Blue Nile, eastern Sudan and, finally, in Darfur.

In fifty-five years of social and political engineering, the Sudanese political class failed in the state and nation-building processes. That about 99 per cent of southern Sudanese voted for secession in the referendum which led

to Sudan's dismemberment epitomises this failure. The turbulent history of the Sudanese state formation may have been a factor in the South Sudanese decision to break away. However, governance, and good governance for that matter, remains the determinant factor in Sudan's stability as a state and nation. Governance rooted in the country's multiple diversities could have been the only guarantee for Sudan's unity and viability.

So when we speak about the consequences of southern Sudan's secession, it is important and imperative to focus on the future rather than on the past. Each of the emerging two states, the predecessor and the successor, carries the virus for future instability and possible dismemberment. The South Sudan has been running its affairs independently for the last six years, thanks to the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA). The ruling elite have committed grievous mistakes of governance that jeopardised the opportunity for mitigating the negative consequences of war.

Following the tragic death of Dr John Garang, a paradigm shift from liberation to a power agenda occurred, triggering a power struggle between various competing factions. This manifested itself in the widespread insecurity in southern Sudan, ethnic conflicts, corruption in government and society, lack of social services, and so on. No wonder that some spectators of the Sudanese theatre passed the verdict that South Sudan would emerge as another failed state. It was only owing to the civilised and orderly manner with which southerners behaved during the referendum that some of those people changed their minds. The ruling political elite in South Sudan must change their *modus operandi* if South Sudan is not to slide back into conflicts and anarchy.

Similarly, the ruling political elite, particularly the NCP, should draw a serious and honest lesson from the secession of southern Sudan. A modern state cannot be built with the instruments of political domination, oppression and social discrimination. The voice for South Sudanese secession grew louder only during the *Ingaz* regime. This was precisely for lack of accommodation of different views, while at the same time projecting an Arab-Islamic identity on the South Sudanese. The mistakes of the 1950s and 1960s should not be repeated. The strong calls for regional self-rule coming from Blue Nile, southern Kordofan and Red Sea states should be heeded, and appropriate responses formulated immediately, lest they are transformed into calls for self-determination. The war raging in Darfur must be addressed as soon as possible; it has serious ramifications on the western part of the country.

Looking at the region, South Sudan should build good neighbourliness with the countries with which it shares common borders, including northern Sudan. This will create conditions necessary and conducive to its immediate

and accelerated social and economic transformation. It is necessary because, all along, the borders have invariably divided the same ethnic communities. These communities, such as the Azande in Central African Republic, DR Congo; Kakwa and Pajulu in DR Congo and in Uganda; Madi, Acholi and Dodoth in Uganda; Taposa and their cousins the Turkana and Karimajong in Kenya and Uganda respectively; Nuer and Anywaa in Ethiopia; should become bridges for social, economic and cultural cooperation and integration.

The communities living in the north-south border areas, and who have for a long time been involved in proxy wars, should be encouraged to look at where their interests for survival lie. The Misseriya, the Rezeighat, the Kenana and all the nomadic communities who spend most of the year in some parts of South Sudan will have to change their attitude towards their neighbours in the South. In fact both governments should work together to permit free and unhindered access and to transform by peaceful means any resource-based conflict which may arise from time to time.

The independence of South Sudan is a precedent likely to trigger similar claims in other parts of Africa. One would not like people with similar historical claims to independence and freedom to suffocate in unity on account of the OAU doctrine of the inviolability of colonial borders. Nevertheless, should the ruling political elite in a particular country fail to accommodate the concerns of their disadvantaged citizens (minorities), secession becomes an attractive option. However, this option should be carefully weighed against others important factors of state viability. In this respect, the African Union should engage actively in the resolution of endemic conflicts, particularly those with ethnic and religious streak that threaten the territorial unity of member states.

Most of us assembled in this hall are academics who, by and large, are sometimes passive spectators of the social and political engineering undertaken, particularly by radical political and ideological groups that come to power. Nevertheless, within the confines of our academic profession opportunities exist for influencing the course of events. The National Council for Higher Education and Scientific Research and the Ministry of Higher Education attach importance to the peace study centres established in some of our universities: the Ahfad University for Women, University of Khartoum, University of Juba, Nyala and Alfashir universities in Darfur. Peace and conflict transformation and resolution studies should take centre stage in the coming period. I am glad that CODESRIA, UNECA and ARRF have been involved from the very beginning to provide the necessary resources and expertise for the problems of peace and conflicts in the continent.

In the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, we are developing a policy paper to be submitted to both governments, GoS and GoSS, for endorsement. The concept is for both governments to permit higher education institutions, particularly the university and the faculty, to continue working together as the vital and lively link between the two countries beyond the political and economic relationship. This will facilitate joint research activities in different spheres, research whose results should inform and guide policies. In this respect one envisages that South Sudan's secession and its consequences at the local and regional level, particularly its impact on the regional security architecture in the Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes, should constitute an important research theme. Under this wider theme peace studies can be undertaken, entailing such issues as cross-border cattle rustling, small arms and light weapons trafficking, as well as other social and cultural studies which promote understanding and harmony.

We would want to suggest to the leadership of CODESRIA to put this forum on a permanent, regular annual basis and to take on broad studies of such sensitive but unavoidable themes of Afro-Arab relationships, in the context of the simmering conflicts in the Afro-Arab borderlands of which the conflicts in Darfur, Mali and Niger are part. We cannot afford any more to bury our heads in the sand. The uprising in Arab North Africa is likely to influence events in Sudan and the rest of Africa as people cry aloud for human rights and political freedoms.