



ISS Seminar Report

Title: Sudan at the Crossroads: Elections, Abyei and the Darfur Conflict

Place: ISS Conference Room, Pretoria

Date: Wednesday, 5 August 2009, 10h00 – 12h00

Speakers: Mr. Mohammed Hasan, Consultant in the Presidency, Khartoum; and Dr John G N Yoh, Department of Political Science, UNISA, Pretoria

Chair: Mr. Issaka K. Souaré, Senior Researcher, ASA/ ISS/P

Rapporteur: Halif Sarki (Intern, ASAP/ISS)

Presentations

Issaka Souaré from the ISS chaired the seminar. He opened by thanking the participants and presenters and apologised for the absence of one of the initial presenters, Dr Said Alkhateeb, who was replaced by Mr Mohammad Hasan. Other commitments prevented him from attending.

Mr Mohammed Hasan started by contextualising the situation in Sudan and outlining the various actors and issues. He stressed that the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), which was ultimately designed to achieve lasting peace in this war-torn east African country, was to make 'unity attractive' to Sudanese as enclosed in the Machakos Protocol of July 2002. The CPA was presented in detail and progress in terms of implementation in various sectors was recorded and highlighted. Despite a delay of about six months, the Agreement was finally set in motion. As a result of the enactment of the Interim National Constitution, inclusive (comprising of members of the two main parties to the CPA) legislative, executive and judicial bodies such as the Presidency, the National Assembly and the Constitutional Court were created.

With regards to the upcoming elections, numerous challenges were been identified as possible stumbling blocks to the electoral processes. These include financial issues with lack of sufficient funding for the National Electoral Commission; logistical constraints considering that Sudan is the largest country in Africa yet with

poor transport and communication infrastructure; and security hazards with pockets of rebel militias still active, particularly in Darfur.

On the Abyei border dispute, Mr Hasan noted that after years of protracted confrontations and disagreements, the issue was progressively settled culminating in the final ruling by the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) in July 2009. The Abyei referendum is still to be conducted simultaneously with the Southern Sudan referendum in 2011 and the people of the region and the south in general will get to decide on their status. In other words, Abyei will vote either to remain with the North or to join the South. Emphasis was also put on the close collaboration between both the National Congress Party (NCP) and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) in implementing the various aspects of the CPA. Quarterly meeting of a joint leadership committee of each party or monthly meetings of a joint political follow-up committee and other subsidiary committees clearly illustrate such collaboration.

In his presentation, **Dr John Yoh** acknowledged that some progress has indeed been made in the implementation of the CPA. He however stressed the challenges facing the Agreement and the complexity of the situation in Sudan. He remarked that the CPA was the product of three developments, namely the need to end the war; the international isolation of the Sudanese government; and the need for SPLM to justify its struggle. He pointed that the CPA was a tool by some Western developed countries to transform Sudan and halt the spread of what they considered as "radical Islam" in line with the "war against terror". Dr Yoh also stressed the need to address every aspect of the issue that has gained in complexity over time. The central authority in Sudan is diluted due to the mishandling of the secularisation issue.

Bearing in mind that Sudan is in majority Muslim and that Islam is considered by many Sudanese not just as a religion but a doctrine that encompasses all aspects of one's life, it has become highly difficult to separate religion from the state in the country. Moreover, Dr Yoh held that the CPA lacked representativeness as it only involved two of the role players in the crisis. Other parties were not considered and thus some view the Agreement as a deal between merely the NCP and SPLM and not representing the views and needs of the majority of Sudanese people.

Dr Yoh further highlighted other problems that seem to render difficult the full implementation of the CPA, namely ethnic conflicts in the south and the management of oil revenues. He pointed that about 200 items on the CPA agenda are still not resolved yet its mandate draws to an end. But in his view the greatest challenge to the CPA is the lack of specialised forums to discuss the most critical issues and achieve sustainable progress. The wealth sharing issue for instance, particularly from oil, remains highly contested and might be a source of further disagreements and even conflicts if not effectively addressed. If the South chooses secession over unity, it is highly unlikely to share revenues from its oil fields with the North. This makes the whole concept of national unity rather 'unattractive' for

many in the South as they contemplate the possibility of full control over resources now shared and a certain sense of pride and dignity in being considered a first class citizen.

Report completed on 07 August 2009