

Sudan's vast agricultural potential target of IMF destruction

by Marcia Merry

On Feb. 10, Pope John Paul II is to visit Khartoum, capital of Sudan, as the last stop in a multi-nation tour of Africa, beginning Feb. 4 in Benin. According to wire service reports, among the topics first addressed by the pope upon his arrival in Africa, was the question of the right to national economic development. The situation in Sudan is a dramatic example of the issues.

In Khartoum, the pope will be hosted by the government of Gen. Omar Hassan El Bashir, which came to power in June 1989, partly over the need for economic rescue measures, and for a plan to end the civil war in southern Sudan.

In terms of physical resources, Sudan ranks as one of the world's top 10 "natural" breadbasket regions, and in the last 25 years, major oil deposits have been confirmed. It is the largest country in Africa, and is strategically located as a cultural and geographical bridge between the Arab Middle East and the African continent.

However, the case of Sudan offers a stark picture of how rich economic development potential has been systematically looted and thwarted by foreign powers. Ruled directly by Great Britain from 1898 to 1956, Sudan's economy has not recovered. Since that time the International Monetary Fund (IMF) has subverted economic development, and the flames of civil war have been stoked by foreign intelligence interventions from the United States, Britain, Israel, and the U.N.

In 1990, the El Bashir government initiated its "National Economic Salvation Program—1990-1993," which stated as its chief goal: "Reallocation of the meager resources left to achieve the objective of self-dependency, particularly in view of the mounting economic pressure put on the revolution by many external powers through reduced external assistance and suspension of aid flows."

After two years, key parts of this emergency program have succeeded. Through carefully diverting certain limited agricultural inputs, such as irrigated area and fertilizers, away from cash crops and into staples, Sudan has achieved a grain surplus. Moreover, Sudan is now supplying grain to the World Food Program, and shipping direct food aid to Bosnia, Afghanistan, Zambia, Zimbabwe, and other points of need. The nation has also, for the first time ever, begun to pump and refine its own oil.

However, these gains are far below the existing potential because of the IMF. On the eve of the Persian Gulf war,

when Sudan opposed the positioning of U.S. troops in the Gulf (although opposing the entry of Iraq into Kuwait), the IMF "decertified" Sudan from its membership in that body in October 1990, and decreed that no foreign entities should offer loans, financing, or assistance of any kind.

When, over the intervening period, Sudan managed to redeploy internal resources to survive, the IMF began insisting on a multimillion-dollar monthly payment toward "arrears." At present, the IMF claims a debt from Sudan of \$1.4 billion, and is demanding \$5-6 million a month in debt service payments—an amount the government is refusing to pay.

Africa-wide, the IMF is forcing 23 nations to follow IMF-mandated economic restructuring schemes—the term for looting populations to the point of collapse.

Creating wealth

When the British left Sudan in the 1950s, there were no paved roads, and the one rail line was designed to facilitate exports and military occupation, not development of the countryside. Sudanese nationalists made proposals for nation-building transportation and water projects, agricultural expansion, industry, and public health. The jewel of these designs was the Jonglei Canal.

The canal proposal called for digging a straight channel for the White Nile, above Mayakal, of about 380 kilometers in length. The many benefits of this plan included augmenting the downriver flow of the Nile River by draining swamps and preventing evaporation. In addition, new means of transportation and irrigation would be opened up, and the region freed from the many diseases vectored through swamp conditions. Potential for growing settlements would result.

In the end, the canal was only half-built, and now sits abandoned. The IMF, the World Bank, and political backers intervened to stop it. Civil strife in the region was reignited, and the dislocation of hundreds of thousands of people has been the result. Now such IMF-serving agencies as the U.S.-based Blue Nile Institute are arguing that most people in the Horn of Africa are nomadic tribes, which must forever remain that way, and not be forced to "settle down" by having social or physical infrastructure.

Sudanese Amb. Abdalla Ahmed Abdalla addresses the questions of the IMF, civil strife, and development in the Horn of Africa in the following interview.