
Interview: Abdalla Ahmed Abdalla

We must work toward regional integration

The following is part 2 of an interview with Dr. Abdalla Ahmed Abdalla, ambassador to the United States from the Republic of Sudan, given to Marcia Merry on Jan. 14. In Part 1, (see EIR, Feb. 5) Ambassador Abdalla described the government policies that led to the achievement of a grain surplus over the past two years.

EIR: What is the current situation with the IMF?

Abdalla: We in Sudan are approaching a monitored program, from the starting point of our own Economic Salvation Program, which was conceived and initiated in 1990 to restructure the economy and take care of the economic ills that have been inherited.

You know that Sudan's economy was, to say the least, stagnating, if not declining during the last two decades. And therefore, the new government, in 1989 and early 1990, introduced a structural adjustment program of its own aimed at reversing the economic decline. That was through the initiation and adoption of far-reaching economic reform, including changing policies primarily designed to lead to a liberal market.

Many policies have been adopted; actions have been taken. [After being "decertified" by the International Monetary Fund in October 1990] contacts were revived with the IMF in 1990, and we embarked on renewed negotiations hoping to reach a program built on our own policies and concepts in dealing with the economy.

These discussions continued in 1990-91. Then in August 1992, the IMF was virtually convinced of the direction and the magnitude of the new program, to the extent that Michel Camdessus, the director, issued a letter encouraging donors and financial institutions to cooperate with Sudan in trying to reach its targets through its economic program. The program was actually commended by the IMF, and described as a program that was directed to introduce basic structural changes in our economy in Sudan.

EIR: What is the IMF asking of Sudan?

Abdalla: The situation remains more or less the same, except that in December 1992 there was another meeting, and the IMF seemed to harden in their position of payments. You know that Sudan is indebted to the IMF for about \$1.4 billion, and the IMF is demanding that arrears be stabilized.

Insofar as the policies and the implementation and the actions taken by Sudan, I think the IMF is very close to substantive agreement. But we were thinking of wanting to proceed to what is called the "accumulation of rights" program, because this is a newly introduced program in the IMF that would help heavily indebted member countries to be assisted to deal with their debt with the IMF. This was done for one or two countries before. And we were hoping to move toward that situation through an agreed-upon program with the IMF.

But the difficult issue with the IMF now is to reconcile our debt payment in a situation where Sudan cannot make substantive payments. They want Sudan to make payments that will lead to stabilization of arrears, which is beyond the Sudanese payment capabilities in a situation where Sudan is denied external flows.

EIR: How much does the IMF want?

Abdalla: If you want to stabilize arrears, you have to pay a certain amount, close to \$5-6 million a month. Sudan cannot make these payments, especially now when Sudan is carrying its own economic program, *with no external assistance whatsoever* from any international institution or from donors. Here lies the peculiarity of Sudan.

We have adopted and implemented an economic program, very far-reaching economic program, with very difficult choices and options, in a situation where the international donors are refraining from giving any money to help Sudan proceed with its economic reform. This is the real point which we have been trying to put forward.

If you take Ghana, for example, Ghana is being helped tremendously to carry out its structural adjustment program with external flows coming in, and it is my own personal conviction that if that flow stops, Ghana's structural program will collapse. It is not sustainable in a way.

I think that our program has been largely sustainable even in the absence of external flows. But because of that, we are suffering. We are hurting. We are passing through a very difficult time. Had we been assisted from outside, our program would have proven to be *the* program that would be sustainable.

But the IMF seems to be holding very hard on the condition of payment of debt in addition to policies and actions. These are two parts of reaching a program of agreement with the IMF, policies and debt payments.

In as far as the economics, the policy part of it, we believe that Sudan has done even more than what the IMF usually requires in a structural adjustment program to liberalize the economy. We think we have done marvellously in the area of policies. And the IMF recognizes that; indeed, recognizes that at its top board level.

In the area of payments, they are adamant. This is where we think that the IMF should be imaginative and come up with innovations, and not stick to their classical rules of the



International Monetary Fund and other foreign pressures have halted the construction of the Jonglei Canal, which would drain swamps and open up new means of transportation and irrigation. Shown here is the construction of the main canal in the Rahad agricultural scheme.

necessity for a country like Sudan to pay such amounts in debt, or else. This is the crux of the matter. The IMF is failing to recognize that Sudan is implementing a program in absence of external resources. It is doing it on its own cost. It is a good example of self-reliance. But of course you know that a far-reaching program like that cannot continue and cannot be sustained fully in the absence of external flows of assistance, which we are not receiving. So we think that the IMF should have the imagination and the innovative way of thinking of how to help a country like Sudan that is determined to remedy its economic ills and to proceed with a market economy—of its own choice. The market economy is our own choice, it is not because of the IMF. It is the Islamic way of economy. This is where we think that the IMF needs the vision.

EIR: What about the agricultural potential of Somalia and the Horn of Africa?

Abdalla: Looking at the Horn from an agricultural point of view, the most important objective for the countries is to work toward regional integration, primarily directed toward poverty eradication. The root cause of the problems in the Horn is poverty. Poverty and environment are firmly linked together. The people in the Horn are moving constantly. They are nomads.

In Somalia, they are mostly nomads. So are large segments of population in Ethiopia and Sudan and the northern parts of Kenya. These are mostly people who have been wandering around in this region, without very clear bound-

aries, having the same life and farming system, which is mainly herd-rearing and rain-fed agriculture, which is very vulnerable to drought and risks. And this is why there have been, in the drought years, risks of famine.

People are very easily dislodged because of lack of resources, and because of meagre resources—they exhaust all the resources they have. Therefore, I think the main concern for the Horn should be for implementing a food security policy and a food security program. That can only be done if we think in terms of improved sustainable agriculture and food security. Regional integration should be sought and based on strategies, policies, and improved physical and public infrastructure for agricultural production and marketing.

EIR: How can this be achieved?

Abdalla: We start with the physical and public infrastructure. That is the most important, because we are very close, and at the same time, we are very isolated from each other. The thing that should be done for the Horn, in terms of helping the Horn to eradicate poverty, is to improve its physical infrastructure so that these regions are linked together and so that the problems which are very similar, which are causing the poverty in all of the regions, should be addressed aggressively with a wide drive toward strengthening the economies of these people. And this will call for stability in the region.

But I think that if the people in the region should be given the opportunity to get together and address these basic problems of poverty, they are the best suited to come up with

ideas on how this can be solved. And it is incumbent on the international community to listen, and to better understand the problems, the poverty problems, that have caused all these migrations, all the refugees. The displaced, and the conflicts, the armed conflicts, all of these result from the negligence of addressing the real causes of poverty and insecurity in the region.

EIR: What do you recommend?

Abdalla: I think that vision is required to focus on the tasks of getting the countries' governments together to resolve their conflicts, like us in Sudan. In Ethiopia, certain conflicts are still going on, although the situation is improving. Eritrea is now becoming better. Djibouti is fairly stable now. So I think these governments can sit down together and produce a strategy and vision toward solving the real root-causes of the problems of the region.

EIR: What are the prospects for ending the strife in southern Sudan?

Abdalla: The war in the south is the number one problem for Sudan that's holding it back from advancement and improvement and betterment in our economic situation. That's *the conflict, and the problem*. And this is why the government has always been seeking to resolve this conflict. This would create an environment for Sudan to better manage its resources, and create better economic and social development.

We all think it ought to be resolved in a manner that is fair and just for everybody. This is why the government has given it priority, when it called for a peace conference early after it came to power in 1989.

In September 1989, three months after it came to power, the first conference was held on this issue. For each big issue confronting the government, the government has convened a conference, a very large-based conference, encompassing the spectrum of views and professions, and whoever was willing to participate, including lawyers, doctors, farmers, laborers, people, and leaders from the different regions—south, west, east, north, center.

The 1989 peace conference was primarily to address the conflict in the south. This conference was composed of more than 1,000 people, and was convened for one month, deliberating on the root-causes of the problem. The conference reviewed previous experiences in dealing with the problem, and then, from all this, studied singular conflicts in other areas and how they were resolved, examining all initiatives that have taken place by the different Sudanese governments.

From all this, the 1989 conference generated a peace agenda, to resolve the conflict. The agenda was adopted by the government, as produced by the conference. Ever since, the government has been basing its peace initiative and its peace agenda on that very same agenda.

EIR: What is the perspective?

Abdalla: The agenda says that we recognize Sudan as one united Sudan. We recognize that it is large, and diverse ethnically, religiously, culturally. We recognize that there have been certain mistakes in the more than 36 years of independence. We recognize that there are certain grievances in relation to sharing of power, sharing of resources, and political responsibilities. And in view of this recognition and understanding of the root causes of the problem, which we have dealt with in depth, we think that Sudan should best be ruled in a federalist structure, a united Sudan, with a federalist structure.

EIR: What is the structure?

Abdalla: Sudan is composed of nine states, and each state will have its own government and the opportunity to develop its own society, to express its own culture, to develop its own resources, to mobilize its own people, and so on.

There is a very clear separation of authorities and responsibilities between the central government and the state governments, specified in the Constitution itself. This structure is already partly in place. We now have nine states, and they each have governments, although they are now appointed; in the future, the governments will be elected in the states, just as in the United States. And each state will have its own election for its own assembly, its own government, its governor, his deputy, ministers for the services and development, etc. Sharing of wealth and sharing of authority with the federal sector is open for discussion in a constitutional conference, or any kind of conference.

EIR: What are state prerogatives?

Abdalla: States' rights and responsibilities will be clearly spelled out in the laws. Any state can exempt itself from Islamic *sharia* laws, if the people of that state choose so. And this was meant to cater to the three southern states that are predominantly non-Islamic. But they are not necessarily predominantly Christian. There are people of African beliefs, pagans, animists; and about 17-18% are Christian, and 17-18% Muslim. So they can choose, based on referenda, or any means they select, to exempt themselves from the *sharia* laws.

This was a very big step for the peace process. This is very new. It was never so squarely addressed before: coming out clearly that no Muslim community in the north wants to impose Islam on the people in the south. If they don't like the established *sharia* laws, if they want other laws, secular or so, it is their own business. They can do it. So this was a very big step in the peace agenda.

EIR: Where does the peace process stand?

Abdalla: The government has been working toward getting the SPLA [Sudanese People's Liberation Army] to come to talks. They did go to Nairobi [in December 1990] which was mediated by Jimmy Carter. But it was very clear, very

quickly in Nairobi, that the SPLA had no specific agenda. They were just critical of the agenda produced by the Sudan government. They were not willing to come up with their own agenda; there was no really clear vision of what they really wanted. It was also realized that the conflict has deep roots, and that here is a need for confidence-building, and so forth.

The government was willing to accept the mediation of Nigerian President Ibrahim Babangida, who at the time was the head of the Organization of African Unity, and a conference was held in Abuja, Nigeria in June 1992.

Just before this conference a split occurred in the SPLA. The SPLA went as two groups, negotiating with the government. Then, while they were negotiating, they united. The two parties reached certain basic agreements on certain principles. It was largely positive.

But when the SPLA delegation went back to their constituencies, they fractured again, into three groups. SPLA leader John Garang has been asserting that he is the leader of the SPLA. When actually, in the field, he is not. There are a lot of people who are equally important.

Now, the Al-Nasir group of the SPLA is talking about a two-state solution, separating Sudan into north and south. This is a change for Garang. His original theme was that he is *not* for the separation of the south. Rather, he is for the restructuring of the whole of Sudan, to restructure the identity and the composition and the government structure, and the sharing of power. He has held that Islamic-Arabic dominance should be replaced or restructured into an African identity. I don't know what culture he is referring to. But this was his theme, his concept. He was completely denying that he was for separation. Now he is hesitant.

Garang now seems to have dropped this global view. He had probably realized that in eight years his movement has never gained any northern support. It remained a southern movement and largely tribal. Therefore, he is probably realizing that his movement could not have been a global Sudanese movement because it never attracted any people from the north, except for a handful of individuals. It never appealed to Sudanese nationwide. It remained a largely Dinka movement, and other tribes working with him.

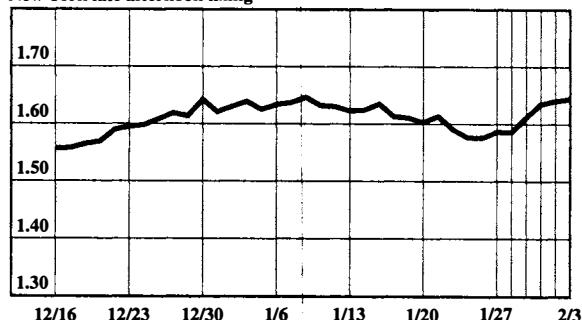
Even now, these new factions are along ethnic lines. There are also those people from the south living in Khartoum. There are about 2 million from the south living in Khartoum and other cities in the north. They are already in the society and in the government. These are people from the south, who either were there before, or were dislocated by the war.

The government is now waiting to resume negotiations, as soon as the different factions are ready to participate in peace talks. This war ought to stop. The government is now open for Abuja again, mediated by President Babangida; and now Kenyan President Daniel arap Moi has offered to mediate.

Currency Rates

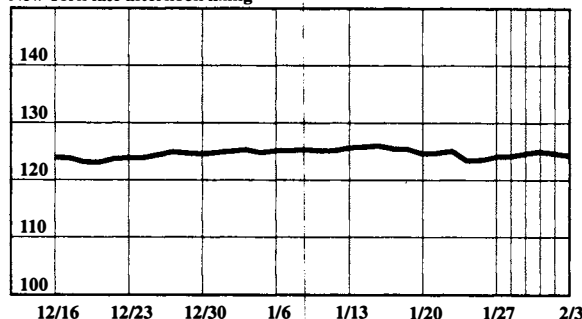
The dollar in deutschemarks

New York late afternoon fixing



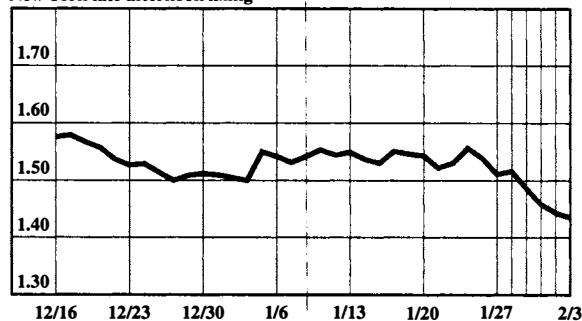
The dollar in yen

New York late afternoon fixing



The British pound in dollars

New York late afternoon fixing



The dollar in Swiss francs

New York late afternoon fixing

