

Africa, now the next big threat to peace and reconciliation is the Sudan government. The parliamentarian explicitly spoke of the “appetite” of the Sudanese government for the rest of Africa. How would you respond?

Machar: I think there is a lot of misinformation, and this is intended. Really what is happening in the Sudan: I fought for 13 years as a guerrilla leader, against oppression, and when I found out that we could make a peaceful settlement with this government, we did it. Sudan should be judged on what it is doing and what it has on paper. Sudan is a federal government. When you take the steps of implementing a federal system of government, it is a higher stage to democratization, and you are ensuring more participation of the people in their own affairs. We have 26 states. If this system is a monster, it would not have chosen federalism as a system of government, because with federalism you have a broader participation of the people. On top of that, now, we have moved to a multi-party system. Anybody can form a party, a number of 100 can form a party, to propagate their views.

There is misinformation about Islam, the cultural differences. I am not a Muslim, but it looks like the countries that are Islamic and which try to bring their religious background into their political life, get misjudged. To the Muslims, *Sharia*, or Islam to them, is a way of life, it regulates their way of life; it is also a religion, it plays a part in the governance. And, this comes to the question of what is your source of legislation. Sudan today has three sources of legislation: One, is the *Sharia*, the Islamic background—the majority in the North has [this background]. The other is custom, and this is particularly meant for the South. The third is consensus, or commonality, what we see, as Sudanese, common among ourselves; we can use it as a source of law when legislating. I don’t think this is unique to Sudan.

We have no state religion, but other countries, Islamic countries, take Islam as a state religion. In the Sudan, it is not a state religion. There is only mention that a majority of Sudanese are Muslims. As for eligibility for holding public office, your religious background is not necessary, your creed is not necessary, your cultural background is not a condition for eligibility to public office.

Now, when statements are made, to equate the Sudan with apartheid, I think this is a gross misrepresentation, and I even think it is lack of information. Apartheid can be based on race, where power is exclusively with one race, which is what happened in South Africa, or when voting rights are denied on the basis of race. But I can also see institutionalized religion. We are talking here, this is the Republican palace, I am assistant to the President of the Republic and I am not a Muslim. I am not even alone: There is another Vice-President who is not a Muslim. So, there is no way of constituting apartheid based on religion.

Apartheid can be instituted on the basis of culture. We have Islamic, African cultures in this country. Our Constitution says, citizenship is the basis of rights and duties, it is not

done on the basis of culture. So, there can be no justification for saying there is apartheid in the Sudan. These are the three basic factors, on which apartheid can be instituted. I think that what brothers somewhere are saying, is not true. If they talk of power-sharing and wealth-sharing, this is the cornerstone on which we fought this war: Let’s share the power equitably, let’s let the wealth be distributed equitably, so that each has a fraction of the national cake. So, I think it’s untenable to support a theory of apartheid in the Sudan.

Interview: Dr. Lam Akol

Sudan’s struggle for peace and development

Dr. Akol is Sudan’s Minister of Transportation. He was interviewed by Muriel Mirak-Weissbach and Uwe Friesecke in Khartoum, on April 15.

EIR: How do you see the current status of the peace process?

Akol: As you know, there have been many sessions of peace talks under the auspices of the IGAD [Inter-Governmental Authority for Development] countries; this initiative started in November 1998, and is still ongoing. In the first two years, they developed the Declaration of Principles, in which they outlined the main principles on which a solution, a just and durable solution, could be reached between the parties in the war. When it started, of course, it was three parties, the [Sudanese People’s Liberation Army] SPLA-United, the SPLA-SPLM of John Garang, and the Sudan government. Those principles, clearly, stated that the first preference was for a united Sudan, and that, failing that, the next option was to grant the people of southern Sudan the right to self-determination, so that they can decide for themselves what kind of future they want for Sudan: Either they want to be part and parcel of a united Sudan, or they would want to have a state of their own. This is the outline of the Declaration of Principles.

EIR: We have followed the peace process closely, and *EIR* has published the documents from 1996 and 1997.

Akol: Then, as you well know, at the moment, a number of countries are opposed to this regime in Sudan, for different reasons. There are regional countries, and the United States, and, to a lesser extent, some other European countries: They want the government to be overthrown; they want to change

the regime rather than getting into a dialogue with it. So, this kind of attitude has influenced the peace talks, because it is the very countries which are opposed to the government of Sudan which are supporting Garang's movement. Their agenda is to see this government overthrown. Then, they would not be seriously moving to bring about peace.

In other words, we are suspicious that some of these countries are not interested in achieving peace now, but they still have options. They think that maybe they can change this government, and then have another government to bring about peace—or whatever they want to do. So, this has been a complicating factor in the peace process. These countries brought together all the opposition groups in 1995 in Asmara [Eritrea], where they signed an Asmara Declaration, and the first principle in that declaration is that the government must be overthrown.

EIR: Was that the meeting organized by Baroness Caroline Cox?

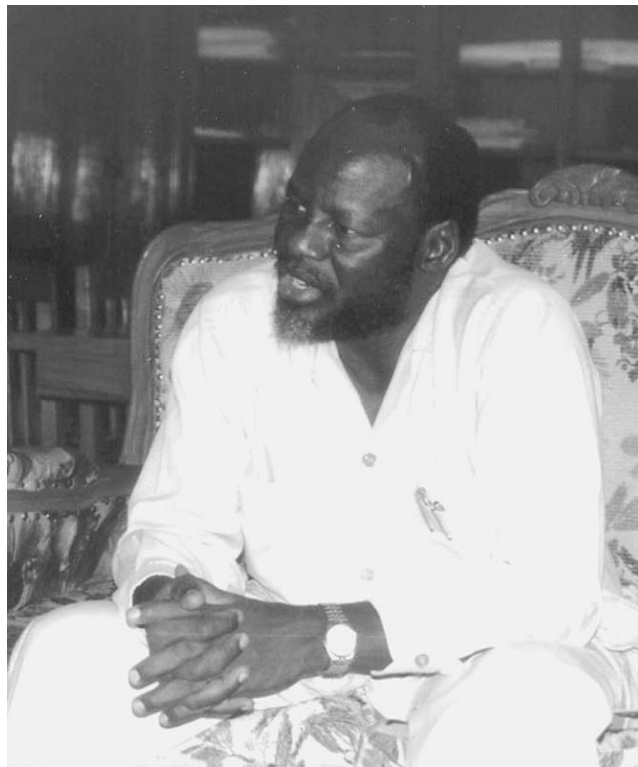
Akol: No, the Cox meeting was in London, in November. The Asmara conference was in June.

EIR: I understood that she was also involved in that.

Akol: I think she went there, to attend it. And the meeting that was held in the House of Lords, was more inclusive; there were people outside the NDA [National Democratic Alliance] who attended that meeting. So, these are the countries that brought the opposition groups together, and they adopted the Asmara Declaration, calling for the overthrow of the regime.

This idea of overthrowing the government comes directly into contradiction with what the SPLA has been fighting for. When we were in the SPLA—our principle has always been, that we would talk peace with the sitting government in Khartoum, what we called the “government of the day,” regardless of its color, regardless of its ideological outlook. What was required is that this government should address the southern problem. If the government addressed the southern problem, then we would reach an agreement with that government, regardless of its political orientation. We started with [former President Gaafar Mohamed] Nimeiri, then with the transitional government, then with Sadiq [al Mahdi]'s government, then with this government. So, all these carry all the political colors in Sudan. And we have talked with all of them. And this confirms the point that our basic principle was to address the issue, rather than a choice of a particular government in Khartoum.

This has now been changed totally by the Asmara Declaration. Now, for the first time, the southerners are talking about overthrowing the government first, and then talking peace with whoever comes after. And this kind of approach is dangerous, and is actually negating the southern problem itself. Because if we take it that the southern problem was created by the successive regimes, starting from the colonial powers and from the national government that came after,



Right now, John Garang is the stumbling block to further progress toward peace, says Dr. Akol.

we are failing to address the issue of equitable distribution of power and wealth. So, if the southerners are to fight, just simply to change the leaders in Khartoum, then we have lost. And all these actors have contributed, in one way or another, to the problem. Sadiq al Mahdi, Osman al Mirghani, all of them were in power in Khartoum, and they did not solve the problem. So, we cannot be fighting to bring them back to power. We are fighting in order to solve our own problem.

This is basically where Garang went wrong, tying himself to a group that is bent on overthrowing the government rather than discussing peace with it. The agenda of the opposition in the north, who want to overthrow the government—of course, that is their only agenda. The government overthrew them, so they want to come back to power. The problem they have with this government, is nothing else than this. You can understand their position, but what about Garang, who has been fighting this war: Why was he fighting them? He was fighting them to see that the southern problem is addressed. Now, the position of these groups—the northern opposition which wants to overthrow the government, the regional countries that want to overthrow the government, the U.S.A. which wants to overthrow the government, and some other countries—their agenda now, is one: the northern position. Now they have succeeded, to divert the agenda of the south from the question of looking for rights from the national government in Khar-

toum, to that of changing the government itself. This is a development which the southerners take very seriously; they are not happy with it.

Therefore, if we want to arrive at peace, we must disentangle this element. Is Garang free from the allies to address the southern problem, or is he still a part of an equation that seeks to overthrow the government? Because overthrowing the government has its own difficulties, also. Can they do it? And if they cannot do it, does that mean the southern problem has to wait? This is the first issue that is to be addressed by anyone who wants to see a solution brought about in southern Sudan. And, therefore, the southerners see the changing positions of Garang as a way of avoiding to address the issue. In one minute, he says he's for self-determination, in the next, he says he wants to talk about state and religion. Then, because people could not agree on a religion as a way to achieve a united Sudan, this is why people went to the self-determination option. That since you, the southerners, cannot accept an Islamic state, then now you are given the right to choose whether you want to be part of a united Sudan or you want to be a country of your own. So, why does he again bring up this issue?

We think that the shifting positions of the SPLA are indicative of the attitude that they have developed, that they must

be part and parcel of a move to remove the government, rather than to solve the southern problem. And of late, when our Foreign Minister contacted the Egyptian Foreign Minister, and the proposal was presented to the opposition—the NDA [National Democratic Alliance], including Garang—the first thing they talked about was, not the southern problem: They talked about a national government, a national government would organize a constitutional conference; they will address the southern problem and then carry out elections.

So, the issue of the south was relegated to just an item in a program of a national government. That is the difficulty we see. If we are assured that now Garang is free, and is ready to address the problem, then we can discuss, what are the possibilities, the modalities, what are the available solutions.

EIR: Do you think that in the peace agreement, the problems of the south are sufficiently addressed?

Akol: There is nothing more than saying, they have the option of being part of Sudan or being separate. This is a maximum offer. What else? You are told that, okay, you have the right to choose: Do you want to be part of a united Sudan, or do you want to be a separate state? There's no other option. I think this offer must be taken very seriously, for anybody who wants to solve the problem in the south.

EIR: Do the conditions under which a united Sudan would be preserved, as they are laid out in the Coordinating Council of the South of Sudan, constitute an institutional framework in which you think a united Sudan could be preserved, and in which the problem of justice and freedom for the southern Sudanese can be effectively addressed?

Akol: The Southern Sudan Coordinating Council is a formula presented by the Khartoum peace agreement. It doesn't mean it is the only formula. What is important, is the agreement on self-determination, for the south. Second, in order to arrive at that, there must be a transitional period; in that transitional period, there are certain functions to be carried out: You need to resettle the refugees, the displaced; you need to at least establish infrastructure, basic health facilities, an educational system, and so on. You need to register the people for the referendum—these are some of the things that will be done in the interim period.

Then, in that interim period, there must be a kind of government in the south. What is the nature of that government? What is its relation to the north? The assumption is that in the interim period, it is within a united Sudan, because the unity of Sudan is to be put to question at the end of the interim period. There must be security arrangements to guarantee the process itself in the interim period. What are the possibilities of these security arrangements? The relationship between the Sudanese Army and the fighting forces: How will they be kept, how will they be fed, and so on? These are the elements of a solution. Everything else is subject to discussion.

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EIR: Do you see any progress over the last year in the implementation of the measures for the interim period?

Akol: The implementation has been poor. This is a fact. But, who is responsible for that? We are told the Coordinating Council did not try hard enough. It is more than one year—fourteen months—since the Coordinating Council was appointed, and they are still sitting here in Khartoum. They did not go to Juba, to establish themselves and start operating from there. This is a weakness.

But, this is beside the point. The point is, if Garang were ready to address the issues, as I outlined them—is he ready to do that? We are saying that the formula given in the Khartoum peace agreement is not sacrosanct, is not the only option, but these are the elements to which everybody agrees. Garang says he agrees with self-determination. But, then, he knows that there must be an interim period, and during it, there must be a government in the south, related in one way or another to the government in the north, and there must be security arrangements.

EIR: The formulas that have been laid down in the peace agreement, on the issues of power-sharing, revenue-sharing, federalism, the religious question, the law question—do you think these are formulas that could lay the basis to preserve the unity of Sudan?

Akol: All these are subject to discussion. All these were discussed here in Khartoum. If Garang has some input to them, if he wants to change them, if he has some new idea—all these are subject to discussion. What is important are the basic elements of that agreement, which everyone seems to have agreed on, including the NDA. They said that they are for self-determination. They said that they accept an interim period as necessary for the implementation of the referendum; they accept a kind of government in the Council, in the interim period. They also accept that this government must have a relationship with the government in the north, since the country is still one. They accept that there must be security arrangements, how the forces will be positively related to each other in the interim period. In the Addis Abeba agreement of 1972, fifty percent of the time of the negotiations was consumed in discussing the security arrangements. Definitely, you know why: Because of the lack of confidence that has developed in the two parts of the country. So, these are the basic elements of a solution. What we need to put into it, is everybody's contribution. We are not saying that we have all the solutions, but we are also telling Garang that he doesn't have all the solutions either.

EIR: So, you are saying that Garang is the stumbling block right now to any further progress?

Akol: Yes.

EIR: Do you see any possibility of his being moved toward

agreement with the government on this? You indicated before, he is being sponsored by foreign elements, both regionally and internationally—

Akol: — who have an axe to grind with the government.

EIR: What is your estimate of the sentiment of the population in the south? Were a referendum to be held today, do you think there is a consensus for maintaining unity?

Akol: The problem is, that people now are under conditions of war, and under such conditions, you don't expect somebody to decide rationally. This is why we want to have a cease-fire. Once an agreement is made, you have a cease-fire, you have a transitional period, where tempers can cool, people can see basic services being offered to them, where they can see the confidence-building measures taking place. After that, they can decide rationally what they want. But, it is difficult to say at this stage, what their view is. Of course, if you go to them now, under conditions of war, when they are angry, they will take a decision that is not well thought out. It will be more of a reaction, than a rational decision.

EIR: What would your vision for the future of Sudan be?

Akol: As a person, I would think that if the country is really given an opportunity, that whatever system people agree is a just system—that guarantees equality, that gives freedoms to everybody, religious freedoms, democratic freedoms, human rights, and so on—one would opt for a united Sudan, because the world now is moving toward conglomeration rather than division.

EIR: Do you see elements of the peace treaty moving in that direction, laying the basis for that?

Akol: This is what I am hoping. Let's hope that whatever peace agreement all agree upon, including Garang, should push toward that direction.

EIR: As Minister of Transport, how do you see the future development of the country? Clearly, the war is an enormous obstacle to development of any infrastructure. But what kind of vision do you have of the future, from the standpoint of transport, and trade relations regionally?

Akol: No doubt, transport plays the greatest role in linking the country together. If you don't have a good transport system, it is difficult for various parts of Sudan to interact. As you well know, the country is 2.5 million square kilometers [1 million square miles] in size, a very huge country, so you need to have an efficient transport system that can connect the various parts of it. At the moment, the south is served mainly by river transport. We have only one rail line that goes to the south, the one from Barbanusa to Awiel and Wau. But, basically, we rely on the river system.

We also want to connect to the neighboring countries by rail, countries like Chad, and the Central African Republic,

because if you could do that, then they could depend more on Sudan's ports, rather than getting their goods from western Africa. So, we want to extend to the neighboring countries, by extending our rail in that direction. At the moment, we have a program of trying to develop the rail system, in a way that will make it more efficient than it is now. Sometimes you find a line being used once a week; that is a waste.

We are trying to separate the infrastructure from the operational side. In other words, the infrastructure, the rail system, the communications, the stations—that was owned by the government. We want to open up the operation of the railways to the private sector; whoever is ready to invest in running a rail system between Khartoum and Port Sudan, they can use that line. Anybody who wants to use the line from Kosti to the west, can also do that, and so on. Because it is very expensive for the government to run this. At the same time, the government needs to set up strong infrastructure for the private sector to be able to operate. Of course, it is easier for them to run a railway system than for them to pay for extending the rails.

Washington war dog takes diplomatic tack

by Linda de Hoyos

At a one-man seminar at the U.S. Institute for Peace on April 28, John Prendergast presented a three-part policy for a diplomatic offensive by the United States government against Sudan, now that military operations against the Khartoum government have definitely stalled—in short, a policy of war by diplomatic means. Prendergast, formerly with the National Security Council, had been contracted by the U.S. Agency for International Development (AID) to revamp U.S. policy toward Sudan, and had just returned from a tour of southern Sudan and Uganda.

Prendergast has nearly made his career as a crusader against the government of Sudan, working with Roger Winter of the U.S. Committee for Refugees and Ted Dagne of the Congressional Research Service. In September 1997, the three had dominated a U.S. Institute for Peace forum in which they called for a U.S. policy of total war against the National Salvation Front government of Sudan. Assuring attendees that this would not involve U.S. ground troops, they called for total support from Washington for John Garang's Sudanese People's Liberation Army (SPLA). This was their answer at the time to the April 1997 peace accords between the Sudan government and all other factional leaders in southern Sudan, with the sole exception of Garang. This war, said Roger Winter, was required, "even though I know it will bring about a

humanitarian catastrophe."

Prendergast noted that now with Susan Rice as Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs and David Dunn as head of the East Africa desk, the team was assembled that could implement such a war policy. That is precisely what happened after a debate that went into November among Washington policymakers.

However, war failed. Not only did the SPLA, along with Ugandan tank divisions, fail to make serious headway in Sudan in two separate offensives in 1997, but the back-up to Garang from Eritrea and Ethiopia collapsed in May 1998, when Eritrea invaded Ethiopia.

Hence, Prendergast was charged with devising a "diplomatic" fallback.

His proposal hinges on a three-track plan with the aim, he said, of bringing about a "progressive change in the Sudan government, through a comprehensive settlement or as a result of new realities on the ground," meaning a more favorable military situation.

The first track is to be through the talks sponsored by the Inter-Governmental Authority for Development (IGAD), comprised of the countries in the region, and which has been the sponsor for talks between the Sudan government and Garang's SPLA for the last two years under the chairmanship of Kenyan President Daniel Arap Moi. Prendergast noted that the IGAD talks must somehow arrive at a "comprehensive settlement," and that the National Democratic Alliance, the coalition of northern opposition parties and Garang's SPLA cobbled together by Baroness Caroline Cox, Deputy Speaker of the British House of Lords, must be involved. This "comprehensive settlement" is therefore the goal for bringing about a "restructuring" of the government in Khartoum.

Prendergast also called for the IGAD talks, with the next round possibly beginning on May 20, to become the focus of attention from the "international community." Pressure must be brought to bear against Sudan, through IGAD, said Prendergast, who had just met with the IGAD Observers Forum, the grouping of "donor" countries which are to use IGAD as a focus for international attention against Sudan.

Second, Prendergast called for "grassroots" peacemaking in southern Sudan. He cited the late-February conference of the Dinka and Nuer chiefs as an example. That conference, sponsored by the Sudan Council of Churches and coordinated by Presbyterian church leader William Lowery, was funded by the U.S. AID. Garang, a Dinka, has been relying on a base within the Dinka community, particularly from region of Bor, while Riak Machar and other leaders in the Southern Sudan Coordinating Council are often from the Nuer community. Prendergast said that such "grassroots" meetings are important to establish greater unity in southern Sudan, where civil war has been going on since 1991 when many SPLA leaders split with Garang. However, Prendergast emphasized that the principal motivation for holding "grassroots" peace conferences is "to pressure Khartoum."