

United States Institute of Peace
Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training
Sudan Experience Project

Interview # 73 - Executive Summary

Interviewed by: Sam Westgate
Initial Interview Date: April 15, 2007
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The interviewee is an informed southern Sudanese church leader who helped with the South-South dialogue, which led to a fairly unified front for the SPLM in the CPA peace negotiations. His work with the Sudan Council of Churches included publicizing the humanitarian crises that were occurring in the South through aerial bombardment and consequent displacement of peoples. The Council's activities including building a consensus between the dominant Nuer and Dinka tribes.

The informant found that after fitful rounds of negotiations in the 1990s, the big breakthrough came with the Machakos Protocol, guaranteeing the right to self-determination for South Sudan. It was a long road to this point, because the North was actively involved in supporting certain Nuer groups, who in turn sponsored some of the destabilizing central government militias in the South. The Lord's Resistance Army was also destabilizing element that impeded unity in the South.

According to the interviewee, the international community was mainly united in trying to find a peace solution. The big exceptions were Libya and Egypt, who had only an Islamist agenda. As for the negotiations themselves, the informant found that both Sudan and the international community were not sufficiently inclusive in the voices heard at the negotiating table.

As for the CPA's implementation, the informant found the following issues to be unresolved: (1) Abyei, (2) repatriation of internally displaced persons, (3) poor infrastructure, (4) land mines, (5) lack of the promised census, and (6) inadequate sharing of oil revenues. He is also pessimistic whether the 2008 elections will take place or for that matter the referendum promised for 2011. And Darfur looms large, disrupting the CPA process. "The Darfur situation was created to derail the CPA." The interview ended on this pessimistic note.

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Q: Can you describe for me when you became aware or involved in negotiations for the Sudan Comprehensive Peace Agreement? What year or what stage of the negotiations?

A: I was much involved within the New Sudan Council of Churches. The Council was part of organized civil society in the New Sudan. We were involved in advocacy, advocating peace in Sudan, advocating for human rights in Sudan. We were advocating against aerial bombardments against civil targets in Sudan. We were advocating against displacements because of the oil, because it is blood oil, which was fueling the war. So basically that is our advocacy area, on the issues of peace and human rights.

We were much involved in the grass roots peace initiative, peace building, being conciliators and mainly first starting from the grass roots among major tribes. We had a very big round of peace building negotiations among the Dinka and Nuer tribes. These are the major two tribes in the South, which we called People to People Peace Initiative. In a sense, we bring people together, they discuss their issues, they make an analysis of their own conflict, they come with a solution, and then we sign what we call a peace charter among the warring tribes. And we as a Council, we follow, we fabricate, we form peace committees to follow up and protect the peace.

And out of the conferences they come up with peace dividends. Among the peace dividends were providing services. One is to provide educational services so that the two tribes' children, they can be able to write, to build peace. We provide water services where the two tribes, the warring tribes, they could be able to use the same well without fighting. We provide health services, where the two tribes could be able to use the health services as part of the peace dividend. And we started at that level and also we are much involved in reconciling the factions within the SPLA, the two groups that broke apart in the 1990's until they were able to come together again as one body.

When the peace negotiations started, we formed what we call Sudan Ecumenical Forums. These forums consisted of our ecumenical partners, international partners that facilitate the Sudanese effort in accompanying the peace process. We discussed the issues when the peace negotiations were going on and then we came with some resolutions and we had an envoy that took the submission to the peace talks. We had a World Council of Churches representative as our ecumenical accompanist. So this ecumenical accompanist

took the resolutions of civil society to the former Sudan government and then the SPLA and to the negotiating table.

Of course civil society incorporates different organizations within south Sudan: the trade unions, different political parties that had an interest in peace, women, youth, chiefs, judges, we bring them all together, religious groups. Then we were able to come with resolutions that went to the peace negotiations.

One of the major things that we did as a church was to advocate for acceptance of the right of self-determination for the southern Sudanese people, which we were able to push this into the Machakos Protocol. It was accepted in the negotiations as part of the protocol. And then later on we started a civil society forum to discuss the process of the peace negotiations that were going on, until we came up with South-South dialogue. South-South dialogue was to bring Southerners together to dialogue, bring different armed groups together, political groups together, to come up with one solution in the South. So these are activities that we were able to do during the peace negotiations that came up with the Comprehensive Peace Agreement.

Q: You mentioned the Council,,I and this is the Council of Churches?

A: The Sudan Council of Churches is comprised of 14 member churches, both churches in the South and in the North, and the Catholic Church is a member of the Sudan Council of Churches.

Q: Just to clarify, at what approximate year did you and the Council become involved in following the North-South negotiations and sometimes even what we might call pre-negotiations?

A: We started in the 1980's, '88, '89, when the peace talks started in Abuja in Nigeria. We were able to send church leader delegations to meet, at that time it was Sadiq al-Mahdi, the prime minister before Omar took over in the military coup. After Abuja I, Abuja II, the churches were involved in that. After the coup, in 1994, when the Sudan Ecumenical Forum was formed, to be able to follow the peace negotiations. So, from quite an early time.

Q: And were you following the U.S. objectives at all stages, even the pre-negotiations and the negotiation stages? Were you keenly aware of what the U.S. was advocating?

A: We were quite aware. We had a lot of influence among the churches, because of the moral authority the churches had, because of the voice the church could speak for the voiceless, because during the war, even among the redeemed SPLA-controlled areas people had no say, they were not able to speak openly but the churches could speak openly and also calls for church-SPLA dialogue, which was done in 1987 in southern Sudan in the town of Kajiko. We called it the Kajiko Dialogue, between the SPLM and the church, whereby we were able to iron out some differences and the SPLA was able to open passages for churches to move between the government area and the SPLA area out

of that dialogue. People could come to Khartoum and go to SPLA areas without being harassed. So it was a great milestone. And out of that, also, the church was requested to bring chaplains, to be able to work with the movement, to discipline them, to speak on the issue of peace, to speak on moral issues among the movement. I think there was a great impact which the churches were able to do among the communities in southern Sudan.

Q: Can you tell us, since you were following this, let us say at the point of the mid-1990's, what do you think the U.S. objectives were, as far as achieving some kind of peace in Sudan?

A: At that time the U.S. position was not clear to us. Even the SPLA position was not clear. It was becoming almost a Marxist movement. We also were wondering, is this Marxism or what? We were able to talk to our church members in the United States, who were able to talk to the government, to look keenly to the process of peace. That brought the government of America on board. So the government of America was able to listen to the churches, was able to listen to their representatives, NGO's and other bodies that are working in Sudan and labor in Sudan, seeing what are the issues. For instance, the issue of aerial bombardment, which the government of America spoke keenly about and also got involved in a no-fly zone initiative in the area of the Nuba Mountains, where the ceasefire first started. Those were American government initiatives to pave the way for peace negotiations.

Q: Now we can turn more to Sudan itself. Can you describe for me the most important Sudanese parties, North and South, parties and groups and what their positions and roles were in the negotiations?

A: In the negotiations, the parties had no role, because the negotiations were only between the SPLM and the government of Sudan, the legal government. The other political parties were not part of the negotiations. That is why some of them are saying the Comprehensive Peace Agreement is not comprehensive, because members of other parties were not involved and other civil society groups were not involved. This is why as a church we took the initiative to bring civil society together to put our words together. But in the negotiations the parties were not involved, only the SPLA and the former government of Sudan.

Q: Maybe we can then refer to the several roles played by the various parties and factions and groups in Sudan. Can you give us a little tour of the horizon of those groups and what they were advocating, North and South? Maybe we should start with the North.

A: In the North, as a Council, we had a common advocacy strategy with the councils in the South, but the other parties in the North, to the South it was almost like we are enemies. The Southerners do not see any involvement of either northern parties or northern civil society in advocating for peace in Sudan, except the church that was more neutral, talking on behalf of the people in the South.

Q: So would you say that northern church leaders were the only advocates really of peaceful resolution of the North-South problem?

A: That is it. The churches were all united.

Q: How about in the South? Were there groups that we could describe as performing a constructive role and groups that we could call spoilers, in terms of their influences on the SPLA?

A: In the South, the advocates are also the church, the non-governmental organizations, the groups that are providing humanitarian services were advocating for peace and also grass roots organizations were advocating. The spoilers were mainly the government militias that were supported by the northern government to disrupt peace in the South. Apart from the government militias, also there are groups like the Lords Resistance Army from Uganda, which was being supported by the government in the North to spoil peace, to destabilize people and divide people along tribal lines, along regional lines, so that they are more divided, not united. These are some of the things that were happening in the South, but the churches, the local communities, NGO's, international community NGO's were advocating for peace in Sudan, linking with their own governments, whether Europe or America or Australia but they listened to what they were saying from the grass roots.

Q: Could you tell me which tribal groups were supporting the government militias in the South?

A: There is a group from the Upper Nile, a tribe called the Nuer; there are some factions of the Nuer that broke from the SPLA. They were being supported by the government of Sudan and also there was a group in Equatoria called the Equatoria Defense Force which was also being supported by the Northerners to destabilize peace in the South. The other smaller tribes that are more independent, they are not SPLA, they are not even supporters of the government, they are more cattle herders that always have arms, they want to be independent, they are also spoilers of peace. But during the negotiations, in the South-South dialogue the churches were able to convince these groups to either join the SPLA or disband themselves. But through the South-South dialogue these groups were able to come and join the SPLA. So at the moment there are only two pockets of them within the South that have not come out clearly, being used still to destabilize the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, together with the LRA.

Q: Did you feel, from your position with the Council, that international organizations such as IGAD, the UN, the EU, the AU and its predecessor, the OAS, did they have significant roles that they were playing in trying to achieve peace in Sudan?

A: I think the most significant role played was by IGAD. Of course the American government, the European governments were able to use IGAD as a tool to bring peace. The other agents, like the AU or the European Union were not much involved, though

they may have funded the process. They did not play a lead role in fabricating the peace. It was left to IGAD.

But currently, when peace was signed, we see that IGAD, which played an instrumental role in bringing the CPA, is lagging behind. In contrast to the UN peacekeepers that are in Sudan, the UN agencies that are working in Sudan, IGAD is not monitoring the implementation of this peace, which they made themselves. IGAD is not in a position to monitor for themselves.

Q: How did the United States relate to these international organizations, in your experience, on the issue of Sudan? Do you think the U.S. appreciated the roles of IGAD, the UN and the EU? Were they all working in harmony or did you find areas of difference and even conflict?

A: I think there was cooperation, areas of understanding. I have not seen very much differences among the international community. I think in the area of participating and supporting the peace the American government has really provided a lot in that sense, which we also appreciated. From the church point of view, we don't see any differences among these international organizations or UN agencies, including the USA. There is cooperation and understanding.

Q: You have certainly mentioned the role of non-state actors, meaning religious organizations. What about other non-government organizations? Did they have a significant role?

A: The significant role played, apart from the religious organizations, we see USAID. USAID is providing peace dividends, is providing training

Q: USAID is of course a government organization. I mean the non-state actors, non-governmental organizations, not to include the religious councils. Which NGO's do you think played a significant role in supporting the peace process? I'm talking about CARE International, and Oxfam

A: Most of the programs, they were providing mostly services. Others were providing food, others were providing medical facilities. CARE was providing educational facilities. We have an organization called PACT, which is an American organization. We worked with PACT for three years, through funding by USAID, for peace building and peace reconciliation, where we worked together with PACT in grass roots initiatives, mainly conferences and reconciliation of different groups. We signed an alliance agreement for three years, which we finished in 2005.

Q: Did you feel that PACT and these other international aid organizations, NGO's, did they have any influence on negotiations?

A: No, they were not part of that. Mainly the influence they had was at the grass roots community level, not in the negotiations.

Q: If we could now look at the role of the regional states surrounding Sudan, who do you think were the most significant players, in terms of affecting either the progress of the negotiations or retarding the progress of the negotiations?

A: Most of these countries were influential in bringing peace, except Egypt. Egypt up to now is opposed to the CPA. Libya also is opposed to the CPA. Mainly they oppose it because of fear that South Sudan may secede, because of the right of self-determination, the Southerners may vote for independence and that will affect the water treaty. They have interests in the Nile. And also, of course, Libya has interest in Sudan as a route of Islamization. By creating Southern Sudan, it will be a stumbling block for the spread of Islam. So these two countries were more critical of the process. They tried to pull it out of IGAD. Egypt wanted to take it to Egypt. And then Libya wanted it in Libya. Of course, the influence is more the Islamic League, which is part and parcel of this divide, against the CPA and the South. So these are the countries, but the other countries were cooperative and they wanted to see peace achieved in the region. War in Sudan affects all parts of the region. So apart from Egypt and Libya, the rest of the countries of course were for peace. Of course Ethiopia and Eritrea, they have also their own differences with the Sudan government, because of the rebels that are being harbored in Sudan, causing some problems for Ethiopia and Eritrea. Uganda, of course, has the LRA. But in principle those governments, in spite of these other, smaller movements destabilizing them, they are all for peace.

Q: Now if we can turn to the major powers, what role did the United Kingdom, Norway and the U.S. play in negotiations?

A: I think one is that they supported financially the peace negotiations. Two, they were part of the negotiation process at the table. And also apart from negotiating at the table, they also took the different groups, the SPLA and the government, they sponsored them to go and see what's happening in South Africa and what was happening in Europe, how to build their capacity, how to be able to negotiate in good faith. These are some of the processes through which they were able to influence the negotiations.

Q: Did you find differences among these three, the triad of the UK, Norway and U.S., on actual negotiating positions?

A: I think we did not see any differences, because all of them were working for one goal and we have not heard from the Sudan government or the SPLA, talking against this government or that government. I think all of them were for one specific goal. We did not see any differences.

Q: In terms of the negotiations themselves, what would you say were the major turning points?

A: The major turning point was acceptance of the Declaration of Principles, which was part of the Machakos Protocol. The major turning point was when the idea of the right of

self-determination was passed, and this made the peace process continue. If this was not accepted, it was going to make it very difficult and as I said, I think the churches were able to lobby this with the British government and were able to lobby this with other European governments, with the American government and with other institutions that are linked to those governments. So that was a major turning point. If the right of self-determination was not included in this process, I believe the war might have continued.

Q: In terms of the Council and yourself personally, were you convinced that these negotiations were finally successful? Did they meet your expectations? And, secondly, in what way did they not meet your expectations?

A: The outcome of the negotiations met our expectation. Our expectation was more on the right of self-determination, let the Southerners have a chance to choose either for unity or for separation. And I want to say that I personally, when we went to England in 2002, we were able to preach, lead a devotion on the issue of the right of choosing. Then the question was given to me, "If the right of self-determination is given to the Sudanese, will the church and the community be able to stand behind their people, to talk about the right of self-determination in an impartial way? And will the political community support the churches?" And we were able to convince the negotiators in Machakos on these points. As I said, that was a big turning point. As a church, we were able to lobby for this. So our expectations were achieved. We don't want to advocate division, we do not want to advocate for unity. But let people choose for themselves, whether they want to be in a united Sudan or they want to be in a separate state, so that is our aspiration that we feel has been achieved.

Of course, our situation is now at the time of implementation of the CPA. We do not see any transparency between the two partners in implementing the CPA. That is one thing.

The second is, during the war the churches were able to talk, were able to support the people. But at the moment we don't see any positive engagement between the church and the government, whether the Government of Southern Sudan or the Government of National Unity. So we are surprised things are happening like this. As a church we are with our people, we support our people, we are building peace, not only for the church but for the entire Sudan. So we want a positive engagement between the church and the government, what role we can play as a church, what role the government can do. Of course we don't want to be part of the system of the government, but we want to be a watchdog, we want to monitor the implementation, we want to talk to the government, we want to tell them about good governance, we want to talk to them about human rights as a church. We want to talk about development. We want to talk against tribalism and against regionalism. These are the things that we feel should be avoided at the moment.

Q: If I could turn back now to the United States, in hindsight, if you could have changed or influenced the policies and practices of the U.S. in the negotiations, what would have been different?

A: I think what would have been different, other actors that were not part of the negotiations, like other political parties, would have been included.

Q: So the U.S. was not supporting an inclusive policy, as far as engaging and reaching more widely into groups within Sudan to be officially part of the negotiations, is that what you are saying?

A: I think there was not support of inclusiveness, of every party or different groups to be part and parcel of the negotiations.

Q: But they did not, at that time?

A: They did not.

Q: You said the U.S. should have supported a more inclusive policy, of including more groups and voices in the negotiations. How about on the Sudanese side?

A: From the Sudanese side, of course, we see the two parties were against inclusiveness of other parties. The SPLA and the government, they excluded other parties [**from being**] part of the negotiations.

Q: So there was a failure of inclusiveness on all sides?

A: Yes, there was a failure of inclusiveness. That is making now other parties work against the CPA. They said, “okay, we don’t own the CPA, because we are not part and parcel of the negotiations.’ So the ownership is being disputed by these other parties that said, “we are not included.”

Q: Do you feel that if the U.S. had, or other international groups had, intervened, let us say, in a more timely fashion, that would have led to a more rapid conclusion of the CPA?

A: I believe so.

Q: Was there any impact, in your view, of the U.S. Congress passing the Sudan Peace Act in October 2002? Did that have any influence on the negotiations?

A: It had a big impact. It pushed the peace negotiations ahead. Also, it gave more magnitude to the intensity of the fight, so it is a big impact on that.

Q: Now if we could turn to implementation of the CPA, what are the primary shortfalls or problems with implementation?

A: The primary shortfalls of the implementation, one is the border issue, the Abyei issue, the southern Blue Nile issue, the Nuba Mountains issues. There are a lot of issues happening in these areas to which no attention is being paid.

Secondly, during the implementation, I think the community wants to feel the peace dividend. The peace dividend is not being felt.

Thirdly is the issue of repatriation. Peace has been signed. Those who are internally displaced want to go back to their own native land. They cannot go because there is no repatriation exercise taking place. Others, they go on their own, what we call spontaneous returning. They see these areas, there are no services, there is no school for their children, there are no medical facilities for their families. So they go back to the camps. So people question, "What peace? We feel peace has been achieved. We want to see that. Okay, all of us would go home."

Fourth, the issue of land mines, anti-personnel. The people cannot go to their own lands. It is causing another conflict, internal conflict among the communities.

So we find that these are the issues that need to be ironed out for the settlement of the people, the repatriation of the people.

Another issue is that of the census. Up to this time no one knows whether the census is going to take place, whether people are going to have elections which were meant to be held three years after signing of the CPA.

These are all gaps of the CPA implementation.

Q: I notice you have not mentioned the division of oil resources, revenues from oil resources in Sudan. Is that also an outstanding issue?

A: This is a dispute between the two governments, the Government of Southern Sudan and Government of National Unity, about oil resources. And of course we see and we have witnessed that from the border, the government in the North is pushing southwards to dispute the border and the oil resources that are being divided between the North and the South. First, we do not know how this money is being used and it is not being explained to the public. So this is a diversion of resources. People are questioning, is there rampant corruption taking place? And of course in the South those are activities which civil society is not happy about. This rampant misuse of public funds, which we feel should be used for the development of the people, to provide services, to provide roads, to provide safe passage for communities to go back, so that they can be self-sustaining rather than remaining in the camps. At least people should go back home and be able to plant for themselves. So these are some of the things that we feel the CPA is not addressing.

Q: And how in terms of the various protocols? In a way you have mentioned them already. But are there sufficient bureaucracy and experts in place to monitor the CPA?

A: We see the UN monitoring crews but we question what is the measurement for the reports that they are coming out with. The UN has been the first body to monitor peace,

but we feel that they are not well spread out, whether in the South or indeed other areas where the CPA needs to be implemented. So this is what we see, [that makes the whole implementation and monitoring to go very slow. I think there is a need for increasing the capacity of the various parties.

Q: And I want you now, if you will, to look into your crystal ball and give us some prediction of what you think will happen in the future. As you know there will be elections next year and then in 2011 there is supposed to be a referendum on the future of southern Sudan and indeed all of Sudan. What are your predictions, or even hopes, for the future?

A: My prediction is the government in Khartoum, the federal government, is using the CPA to consolidate their power. These elections might not take place, because there are a lot of frustrations. There is no transparency in this. If elections take place, it will not take place in a timely fashion, it will be delayed.

In 2011, if the Southerners are well informed, understanding the meaning of the right of self-determination, if the northerners make unity attractive, there will be one Sudan. But if they do not make unity attractive, the country will divide. And if the truce agreement does not work, the war will start again. So Sudan will go back to war.

My predictions: one is that the government in Khartoum will play a role to confuse people, to divide people, so that they remain in power in the absence of the CPA. And the second is if they make unity attractive, they meet the aspirations of the Southerners, the country will remain one. If they do not, the country will divide.

Q: To what extent do you feel that the peace process between the North and the South laid the foundations for violence in Darfur?

A: I think Darfur started when peace in the South was almost ready to be signed. The Darfur situation was created to derail the CPA. So that was meant as a tool to destabilize the CPA. So the Darfur situation has a lot of effect now, in the South, on the CPA. It has distracted the attention of the international community, to neglect the issue of the South. So Darfur is a self-created organ to destabilize the South's agenda.

Q: Because Southerners were also involved in destabilizing Darfur as well, to what extent could the North and the South have prevented, during the whole CPA process, this kind of new regional conflict from occurring? How could this have been prevented?

A: I think the only thing is the South, if they would have had any influence in the Darfur situation, is to pull out or to be a peace mechanism for Darfur and also that would influence the government in the North to be able to have influence on regional border states, either with Chad or with the Central African Republic, which is also going to be affected because of all these border dimensions of the issue. I think the South has a role. Recently they appointed an envoy from the SPLM on the issue of Darfur. I do not know

how much the impact will be, in that sense. But if the Southerners are not part and parcel of fueling the Darfur issue, I believe the Darfur issue will also be solved easily.