



## UNITED STATES INSTITUTE OF PEACE

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to promote peaceful resolution to international conflicts

### *Moving the Peace Process Forward*

A consultation with members of the North American Darfurian Diaspora  
community

January 25-26, 2010

#### **Summary Report**

In 2008 the U.S. Institute of Peace<sup>1</sup> convened thirty-five Darfurians who reside in North America to discuss issues related to the conflict situation in Darfur. In January 2010 USIP reconvened many of these Darfurians, plus additional members of the North-America-based Diaspora, one representative from the European Diaspora, and another from Cairo, for a two-day follow-up consultation. Twenty-seven Darfurians participated in the 2010 conference.

Participants in the consultation represented a full spectrum of Darfurian constituencies, however their participation in the consultation was on a personal basis rather than as representatives of the organizations to which they belong. Additionally, comments and recommendations in this summary report have been given without attribution, in order to ensure an open and frank discussion.

While the 2008 consultation focused on substantive issues related to the causes and drivers of the conflict in Darfur, the 2010 consultation focused on aspects of the Darfur peace process. The consultation was divided into three sections: the role of civil society in the peace process; the role of external actors (including the United States and the Diaspora) in the peace process; and the way forward in the peace process.

Because participants were present in their personal capacity, the recommendations below do not represent official policy of any organization with which participants are associated. In addition, the views expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect the positions or policies of the U.S. Institute of Peace, which does not advocate specific policy positions.

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<sup>1</sup> The U.S. Institute of Peace is an independent, non-partisan institution established and funded by the United States Congress. Its goals are to help prevent and resolve violent conflicts, promote post-conflict peacebuilding, and increase conflict-management tools, capacity, and intellectual capital worldwide.

Views and recommendations from the consultation are summarized below:

### **The Role of Civil Society in the Peace Process**

There was general consensus among the group on the definition of civil society; one breakout group called it “individuals and groups who work for the advancement of Darfur communities through civic means.” Distinctions were made between older civil society organizations formed prior to the current genocide, and those formed in recent years. The former are often led by traditional leaders, and the latter led by a younger generation and women. The newer groups generally find greater support from international non-governmental organizations. Furthermore, local organizations formed before the genocide tend to be less independent than those formed during the genocide. The groups formed during the genocide are able to mobilize people on the ground more easily, but encounter more resistance from the government.

Significant time was spent discussing the appropriate role of civil society in any Darfur negotiations, whether in Doha or elsewhere. There were differing views on this role; however, most participants did not believe that civil society representatives should have a formal “seat at the table” during negotiations. Participants advocating this position cited the challenge of identifying appropriate civil society representatives, and worried that having civil society as a “third party” directly involved in negotiations may make those negotiations exceedingly complicated. Instead, most participants felt that trustworthy civil society representatives should have a recognized status as close advisors/consultants to the armed movements and the larger peace process, and should be present at negotiations, even if not directly engaged in those negotiations. In this capacity, these representatives would educate movements at the table about the views and opinions of Darfuri citizens and raise awareness among citizens about the peace process. Nonetheless, several participants felt that civil society representatives should have a formal role at the negotiating table, engaging directly with the government and armed movements. The advocates for direct civil society involvement in negotiations were skeptical about whether the armed movements truly represent people at the grassroots.

There were several calls for greater unity between civil society and the armed movements. The example of the SPLA/SPLM in Southern Sudan was cited as a model for creating unity among opposition movements.

#### *Recommendations:*

1. Darfuri civil society has an important consultative and advisory role to play in the Darfur peace negotiations and should be actively involved in the process, but should not be at the negotiating table itself.

2. Greater care must be taken by the US and UN/ AU to selecting truly representative and independent individuals and organizations from civil society to participate as consultants to the peace process.

### **Role of External Actors in the Peace Process**

Participants agreed that U.S. policy towards Darfur has had a neutral or negative overall impact over the past two years. Specific criticisms were that U.S. efforts to unify armed movements have led to increased fragmentation of those groups; the response to the NGO expulsions was weak; there is a lack of consultation with the Diaspora; and too much time is spent engaging the Government of Sudan and not enough time devoted to engaging other actors such as civil society and the Diaspora. Some participants specifically cited the practice of having a representative of each armed group present at talks in Doha as having encouraged the emergence of new groups. Participants also remarked that because the U.S. Government has not been more engaged, it has left space for neighboring countries (Egypt, Libya, Eritrea, and Chad were specifically mentioned) to influence negatively dynamics on-the-ground.

Participants believe the U.S. could have significant leverage on the Government of Sudan in the Darfur conflict, but some of the opportunity to leverage its influence has been lost in recent years and continues to decrease. The perception is that there has been little demonstrable evidence of the U.S. Government using its leverage to pressure the Government of Sudan. Sources of U.S. leverage include diplomatic and economic relations, pressures such as sanctions and embargoes, UN Security Council actions, and the International Criminal Court. U.S. leverage to unify the rebel movements is more limited, as they have been co-opted by neighboring countries such as Chad, Eritrea, Libya, and Egypt. As such, the U.S. should coordinate unification efforts with regional governments. Finally, there was a sense amongst participants that the U.S. Government and international NGOs have become distracted by the upcoming referendum for Southern Sudan and elections, and have lost focus and commitment to addressing the situation in Darfur.

Participants agreed that UNAMID does not currently appear to have the capacity or will to protect citizens. As such, UNAMID must be empowered to implement its mandate more vigorously. In order to more effectively protect civilians and peacekeepers, UNAMID needs increased logistical capacity, additional training of troops, and to receive the resources it has been pledged. Some participants also noted that UNAMID is perceived to be close to and heavily influenced by the GoS.

Conference participants felt that the Darfur Diaspora is generally seen as a resource and advocate by those on-the-ground in Darfur. However, there are some criticisms that the Diaspora is fragmented, affiliated with particular armed movements, and in general must move from advocacy to having a more direct and active involvement on-the-ground and in the peace process. If engaged as

such, the Diaspora has the potential to contribute to creating unity amongst the movements and civil society (including different ethnic and tribal groups) involved in the peace process. Some participants suggested formation of a single umbrella Diaspora organization. Similarly, a representative and independent Diaspora taskforce with a mandate to break the deadlock in rebel unification and engage with the international community was suggested, and participants expressed willingness to serve this role.

*Recommendations:*

1. The U.S. should reconsider its current practices to unify Darfuri armed movements, which so far have contributed to their further fragmentation. The U.S. and other mediators need stricter definitions of what constitutes a legitimate group that can engage in the negotiation process, with standards high enough that smaller and less organized groups are compelled to merge with large movements.
2. The U.S.'s opportunity to leverage its influence in Darfur is decreasing. In order to significantly influence the situation there, the U.S. should be bold and consistent in asserting diplomatic and political pressure on the Government of Sudan. The U.S. should be quicker to respond to GoS action and policy that negatively impacts Darfuri citizens and the peace process, such as the expulsion of humanitarian groups. The U.S. must make visible the use of this leverage and pressure in order to gain trust of Darfuri civil society and movements.
3. UNAMID must be empowered to implement its mandate to protect civilians more vigorously by receiving increased logistical capacity, additional training of troops, and the resources that have been pledged.
4. The international community could better utilize the Darfur Diaspora as a powerful resource to create unity amongst those involved in the peace process. The Diaspora will need some training (on negotiations, mobilization) and resources (for information exchange) to serve this role and to overcome its own fragmentation in order to speak with one voice. The U.S. Institute of Peace and other similar organizations should provide regular opportunities for members of the Diaspora to convene and further strategize means to cooperate to positively impact the Darfur peace process.

**The Way Forward in the Peace Process**

Participants generally agreed that maintaining a single venue for negotiations is important. There were mixed opinions of Doha as that venue, and some

discussion of criteria for selecting a new venue, but ultimately participants felt the choice of venue should be left to the negotiating parties. The criticisms of the Doha process included: lack of a clear agenda, not inclusive of all armed movements and of civil society, and lack of transparency. However, participants noted the need for a strong mediator in Darfur negotiations, and the need for the UN/AU and the U.S. to improve communications and cooperation. Participants also suggested that the rebel movements should form a consensus prior to going to Doha in order for talks there to be more successful. In order for civil society to have a positive impact on the Doha process, Darfuri and international NGOs working for peace and development in Darfur should also unify to form common positions on issues and work more closely with the UN and US. They will need funding, capacity building, knowledge, and official recognition in order to serve a more constructive and strong role.

In addition, participants emphasized that Darfuri and international NGOs on-the-ground need greater security and support in order to carry out their mandates. UNAMID can play a greater role in helping local organizations travel safely; providing greater assurance of protection and capacity-building; enabling their freedom of movement; and supporting their ability to operate freely in general.

Participants also recognized that the armed movements are in need of various types of support, including increased capacity to move people, training and capacity building. Some of that training could be provided by the Diaspora.

Some participants noted that holding elections will create new facts on the ground and new representatives that may complicate and negatively impact any peace process. As such, they recommended that national elections be delayed in order to allow the Darfur peace process to proceed.

*Recommendations:*

1. As the mediation process moves forward, it must seek greater transparency, a clearer agenda, and greater inclusiveness of armed movements and civil society. The process would also benefit from stronger and more unified mediation.
2. The rebel movements and civil society should be encouraged to find greater consensus prior to arriving at the negotiating table.
3. UNAMID should provide greater security and support to civil society organizations on-the-ground, giving them logistical support (including visas), and making possible greater freedom of movement and the ability to operate and dialogue freely.
4. The Diaspora, with support, could serve an important role in creating unity amongst armed movements and civil society.

5. Elections in Sudan should be delayed in order for the Darfur peace process to proceed.

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