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

Interview # 55 -Executive Summary

Interviewed by: Sam Westgate
Initial Interview Date: January 26, 2007

The Sudanese interviewee is a member of the SPLM and one of its chief negotiators, having joined the organization in 1983 and participated on the negotiating team since December 1989. His specialties include foreign policy and international diplomacy. He was part of the team that first went to Nairobi in 1989 for negotiations mediated by former U.S. president Jimmy Carter.

The informant noted that the talks leading up to the CPA started with low expectations even though President Jimmy Carter became engaged as a private citizen and was respected as a person of "high moral standing" with "an attitude of religious conviction." According to the interviewee, the 1989 coup in Khartoum brought in Islamic fundamentalists who at first seemed amenable to serious negotiation, though in the end it seems they were just buying time to win international respectability. The Turabi faction continues to this day to espouse hard-line positions in dealing with the CPA and the South.

IGAD and the Friends of IGAD, in contrast, were very serious about the negotiations and wanted peace, because they were concerned that Khartoum represented "a regime that is causing instability in the region." Of the regional players, Kenya was neutral and nonpartisan, and played a willing host to substantive talks. Eritrea was the most adamant in support of the SPLM, and therefore made Khartoum uncomfortable. Kenya had useful "outbursts" when Khartoum was dragging the negotiations.

Of the international players, the U.S. and Norway were the most significant, according to the informant. Norwegian church and NGO groups played a significant role on the humanitarian level. The Norwegian government was influential in bringing other European governments along, specifically Italy, Sweden, and the Netherlands. The UK was not an enthusiastic negotiator at first, until the U.S. became more actively involved. The U.S. stands out because under President Bush, the talks really were brought to conclusion. "Not only did he [Bush] come in as a strong government but he came in individually to see that this peace process be implemented."

In terms of implementation, the informant feels that the "peace dividend" has not arrived. Issues such as the internal border between North and South, the distribution of oil wealth, and protection of human and minority rights still are unresolved. He nevertheless remains optimistic, and affirms that the Sudanese people have grown politically and remain "resilient" with sufficient reserves of "stamina."

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Q: Describe what role you played in the Sudan CPA.

A: I joined the struggle, the Sudan Peoples Liberation Movement and Army, earlier, in 1983 when it started. I was one of the SPLM representatives to argue the case of our struggle and I was the SPLM representative in London. I went to the field to have my training, in terms of an orientation and political training in how we should propagate for the cause. So from 1983 onwards we have been engaged in diplomatic activity and the foreign policy of the movement. In 1989 I was one of the members that was appointed by Dr. John Garang, our late leader, to be on the negotiating team of the SPLM in Nairobi and that was actually mediated by the former president, Jimmy Carter. I was a part of those negotiations. So I have been part, on and off -- because we do it in shifts -- of the negotiating team since 1989. That was December 1989 when I first joined the negotiating team.

Q: Would you say were your objectives and that of the U.S. the same or different? Could you compare and contrast the two?

A: Yes, our objectives. When President Jimmy Carter came in that year, we felt that the other side would take negotiations seriously, but it turned out they were dilly-dallying. But we thought that our position was similar to that of the U.S., in the sense that there must be a fundamental change in the Sudan, a democratic process. Because these people had come in through a military coup with an Islamic agenda, which is in fact using religion to achieve their own political cause, which was an ideological approach on the side of the National Islamic Front (NIF) that we were negotiating with. And we thought that with the mediation of former U.S. President Jimmy Carter, this would help the process of multi-party and democratic atmosphere to come back to Sudan, which we did not see in our first contacts with them.

Q: So did you feel that the U.S., in this stage that we are discussing, through Jimmy Carter, represented an honest effort? Was this a private initiative on Carter's part or did you feel he was carrying the full weight and instructions of the U.S. government?

A: I think he had both. He had first his personality, as a person known for integrity, a person of very high moral standing, a person we believed who also was carrying an attitude of religious conviction. We thought he genuinely wanted to end the suffering, if his personal sort of influence could help bring peace in Sudan.

Secondly, he did not want to do it without the U.S. backup, so definitely he had the U.S. green light to go ahead. I say that, because we have had, when I was in our SPLM office in London, several visits from U.S. Administration officials who used to come from Khartoum and some from Washington to sound out the positions of the SPLM and what role the U.S. government could play. And that even started with the term of President Reagan, when Bush senior was the vice president. He also tried to see how he could help in the Sudan. So we did get suggestions from the side of the U.S. administration that they were interested in trying to find a solution.

Q: I would like you at this point to describe the Sudanese actors, both North and South, including some of the minor players involved. Would you be willing to do that?

A: I could see on the side of the NIF, when they started the talks in 1989, after a military coup, that they thought that it would be easy for them once they shifted into power. They thought that with our chairman, Dr. Garang, also of a military background, that they would easily reach a deal, because they had announced a lot of things when they shifted in, as soldiers.

Of course, they had not yet absorbed their ideological orientation at the time. So the fact that they did not expose their ideological colors, we felt that these people were lying, were not telling the truth. So they came to negotiate with us when we actually knew them, that they were an Islamic fundamentalist group. And actually we were alerted to this, we talked to the Egyptians about this, as soon as they made the coup. Our leadership said, "No, these people are not just good Sudanese that removed the political parties and they genuinely want a solution."

At the same time, our leadership did alert the United States government that these were a group of Islamic fundamentalists, that they were not good people you could do business with. So when we negotiated with them, we knew this color of theirs, which actually the rest of the international community had not yet woken up to, because they were denying it, and telling the Egyptian president, no, they were a genuine sort of Sudanese who wanted to save the unity of the country. So they were not truthful in their commitment to negotiate, not really truthful.

I think they wanted to buy time for them to get acceptability in the beginning and so they made this gesture that they were out for peace. But there were among them, people you could do business with and agree with but there are still very…

Q: And who did you feel that at that time you could do business with?

A: Because at that time they were led by somebody called As-Salih, who was one of their military generals, who is now out with them, no longer with them. Actually he is on the run, more or less. He lost his position with Turabi. But there were a lot of young radicals who were with them and who were behind the scenes, although among the

people who were negotiating, some people were lawyers, others, medical doctors. But you could not tell exactly at that time who was really in charge, except Turabi.

Q: And in the South, in addition to the SPLM/SPLA, were there other players on the fringes that required listening to?

A: In the South, yes. The SPLM/SPLA were composed of a group of very young people at the time -- heavily intellectual -- who were very new in their professions and who felt that they could make a change by the approach they took, that they needed to make a fundamental change in our country. If you had a democratic process established and recognition of being a pluralistic society with unity and diversity, then you could give the unity of the country a chance, on a new basis.

But at the same time we knew there were some respectable southern politicians who were not a part of that. You had parties like the Union of Sudan African Parties (USAP), people like Abel Alier, people like Bona Malwal -- you could go on -- some old politicians who were there. But we had among us some of the old politicians who were respectable, like the late Joseph Aduku, for example, a man who fought from the first Anyanya War on. So it was really a mix of the old and the new, although the leadership was basically led by Dr. John Garang, who was a young man and very highly intellectual and committed.

Q: Which parties, both North and South, would you describe as having a constructive role?

A: I think in the South you can include the Sudan Peoples Liberation Movement, because it had a clear policy. The fact is that it persevered for the last 21 years, where it had undergone a lot of upheavals in terms of the divisions which sprang up among them -- the temptations, the divisions -- but yet it survived. You know we have had a lot of differences with breakaway groups, but still the movement was able to hold the mantle of the party until we reached agreement, the CPA. So the SPLM is very much a credible party. There are other parties in the South, of course, who have their approaches, like the Southern Sudan Democratic Front, who say no, we just want outright secession, we want separation. You have USAP, the Union of Sudan African Parties, you have got about four or five other parties, but the most influential now is the Sudan Peoples Liberation Movement.

In the North you have the National Congress Party that you see and it is divided. That is why you have the Popular National Congress Party of Turabi, who was actually the original thinker of the whole Islamic movement in the country. He has his own party.

Q: Would you describe him as the chief spoiler in the North?

A: Yes, in fact he is the chief spoiler in the North. You have other major parties in the North, like the Umma Party, led by Sadiq al-Mahdi, the Democratic Unity Party, led by Ali Othman al-Marghani. These are the major parties in the North. And then there is the

Sudan Communist Party in the North, which has become very small. But most of rural Sudan, like the Nuba Mountains and southern Blue Nile and the East, seem to have joined the Sudan Peoples Liberation Movement because they thought this was the stronger party, where some of their rights could be addressed.

Q: What did you see as the role of international organizations in this whole process? I am talking about IGAD*, the UN, the EU and the AU, although the AU did not come into the picture until somewhat late; OAU, I guess we should say, the Organization of African Unity and the African Union. Maybe we could start with IGAD.*

A: IGAD, I think IGAD, as you know, initially it started as an economic forum, because of the drought that affected that region, but later on they also played a political role in the region. And IGAD is very, very strategic, in terms of participating in bringing us peace in the Sudan, because as you know the National Islamic Front has an agenda where they were actually destabilizing some of these countries, like Ethiopia. They were supporting Islamic groups in countries like Kenya, the Islamic Party of Kenya. In Uganda they were messing up a lot. In the DRC, they got implicated. In the Central African Republic, they were active. You go to Eritrea, and they were supporting Islamic extremists. So really IGAD was concerned that this is a regime which is causing instability in the region. And that is the issue. The SPLM was supported as a result and IGAD assisted the SPLM to make a fundamental change in the South. Then these destabilizing elements, which usually come out of the northern part of our country, would actually stop.

So IGAD had its own interests in getting involved and they did that, because it is the IGAD initiative now which brought about the CPA. IGAD included Kenya, Uganda, Ethiopia, Eritrea and Djibouti, although Djibouti was playing a minor role on the issue of Sudan, under the chairmanship of Kenya. Kenya took the chairmanship because it was seen as very moderate. Khartoum could isolate it. Khartoum did not accuse them of supporting the SPLM, and then they could manage with them. So IGAD was crucial and strategic in bringing about a solution, as a member of the region.

Q: And how about the others?

A: The others, the Organization of African Unity, at the time, in fact had a lot to be blamed for, because they did not really come out in a clear manner to try and resolve the problem.

Q: They were not a significant player? And the UN?

A: The UN, equally, they were just involved in the humanitarian aspects.

Q: And the EU as well?

A: Yes.

Q: How about what we can call non-state actors and I am thinking specifically of NGOs and religious groups. Which ones were involved?

A: The religious groups and the NGOs were really critically involved in humanitarian aspects. They were the implementers of any aid which came through UN agencies. And in their own right, the community is the result of them assisting those who were caught up in the war. So they played a very vital role in humanitarian assistance, which went a long way to save lives, in terms of food security, in terms of medical care, in terms of raising awareness in their various states about the issues of human rights abuses in the Sudan. They raised the issue of slavery, which the world yet had not known was going on, the issue of the ferocity and cruelty of the war. So really the church organizations, as well as the NGOs, did play a very, very strong fundamental role in the whole issue.

Q: Describe the role -- you have already touched on a little -- of the regional states. Of course they made up the IGAD group but which did you find to be the most crucial, the most influential?

A: In terms of the power of negotiation and dialogue, Kenya played a vital role, in the person of General Sumbeiywo, being the mover in the region. So I would say, yes, Kenya. Second was Uganda. Uganda was forthright in terms of there being outbursts at times when Khartoum was not coming out openly. And then we had Ethiopia. Ethiopia was shrewd, in a way, in the sense that they were consistent that there must be justice done in the Sudan. Eritrea was much more violent in its contribution, because they thought that Khartoum was just playing games with people and that they really were not serious. That is why the Khartoum government was not very comfortable with the participation of Eritrea, because they thought that Eritrea was outright on the side of the SPLM.

Q: Well, in fact we can single out Eritrea. I guess there were a number of military interventions out of Eritrea, is that correct?

A: Not really military interventions but they were very sympathetic to the SPLM. In terms, of course, on the Eritrean side, we had a large military contingent, we had nearly about twelve thousand troops which we actually airlifted right up from Equatoria to the eastern group, because we wanted in that way to divert the attention of the Sudanese Armed Forces. They were concentrating so much on the South and that helped us divert them. Of course, Eritrea was very sympathetic to the SPLM/SPLA, one might say, but they did not really come in militarily, as such. But, of course, they welcomed that the SPLA occupied the area.

Q: And how about arms transfers? That certainly must have been a factor.

A: Most of our arms really did not come as such directly from Eritrea, because the SPLM had the support, one can say now, there are no secrets anymore, that most of the African nations did support the SPLM, which stretches from South Africa to Zimbabwe to Tanzania to all these countries. Kenya did not give us any armaments but a good

number of other countries did. Yes, Eritrea did a little bit, in terms of allowing our presence on the border.

Q: Maybe you could describe the role of the major powers at this point. If you could distinguish the roles of, say, the UK, Norway and the U.S.?

A: Norway: I think Norway played a very, very important role in the issue of war in the Sudan, first at the level of the Norwegian NGOs and the church organizations. In the beginning, it was the Norwegian church organizations who, on their own, were involved in helping and carrying out humanitarian efforts within the SPLM/SPLA controlled areas. They were outright involved. The Norwegian government, on its diplomatic front, also assisted in trying to alert the other members within the European Union that this was a case that needed international attention and intervention. So they really did add the support and involvement of countries like the Netherlands, countries like Sweden, countries like Italy and others, to come in so that they can contribute to the solution. So Norway was the moving country, you must say.

The United Kingdom was a little bit diplomatic in its approach. They did not come in vigorously. They only came in to be much more involved when the United States actually was in the leadership of most of the international community to move on the issue of Sudan.

The position of the European Union, yes, the European Union assisted in terms of humanitarian assistance and in terms of putting pressure on the Sudan government in certain areas.

The U.S., yes, the United States I think, this peace process, a lot was achieved by the U.S. government. As I said much earlier, most of the leadership of the United States government tried, using their own individual influence, people like President Carter, people like President Bush senior, people like the Clinton Administration. They tried their best and now President Bush is doing so, at the moment. In fact a lot of credit goes to the President. Not only did he come in as a strong government, but he came in individually to see that this peace process be implemented. So the role of the United States in bringing about the Comprehensive Peace Agreement was very, very strategic and actually did help Khartoum to come along, because Khartoum was a bit intransigent and very, very stubborn. And it was only the intervention of the U.S. to assist the IGAD countries, through international pressures and through moving of the Security Council, that things moved. And appointing special envoys, people like the Reverend Danforth, started to move the process. The United States was involved in things like the Abyei issue, so that we have the proper solution to it.

Then you get the IGAD Partners Forum, as we said, which consisted of those four countries: that is, Norway, the Netherlands, the UK, and Italy. They are the Friends of IGAD. Also, Great Britain played its role in order to be a part of that group that assisted with the process.

Q: Maybe you could describe for us at this point some of the modalities and the flow of the negotiating process. What were the major turning points, during the period when you were involved?

A: The major turning points were first, you know when these people came into power, even though we had actually started talking since the days of Nimeiri. From 1985, when the first contact was made, under Nimeiri, we went to Koka Dam in Ethiopia where we had the political parties; that was done after the overthrow of Nimeiri. I think that was the beginning, that the SPLM could talk and when the parties came into power, people like Sadiq al-Mahdi and the rest of his movement, we continued talking to them, trying to find a way out. There were a few breakthroughs here and there. But when the NIF in 1989 came into power and after they tried a lot of military force, and they could not break through, they agreed, then, with the help of countries like Nigeria, to talk. You know, President Obasanjo, in Abuja I and Abuja II, so called because talks were being mediated by President Obasanjo of Nigeria. The first breakthrough was really when the NIF agreed on what was called the Declaration of Principles, which gave the South some six principles, one of which was the right of self-determination, to choose either to remain united or secede. I think that was a breakthrough.

The second breakthrough was in Machakos, where the issue of state and religion was resolved, because that was a block. But then the two sides agreed, "look, the South shall be exempted from Sharia and Sharia law can continue [in the North]." That was a breakthrough.

Then came the most strategic breakthrough, the security arrangement, when we agreed to have the three armies, with the SPLA as a national army to be based in the South under the Government of South Sudan, and the Sudan Armed Forces to withdraw northward, and then the creation of joint integrated units. The next breakthrough was the wealth sharing, in which the issue of oil and how we were going to share the oil, I think that was very important. And then finally the sharing of power.

After all these, but what actually gave the last green light at the end, that actually solution was coming, was when we agreed on the Abyei Protocol. The Abyei Protocol was really a red light, because if that was not agreed upon, there would be no CPA today. That is why we are saying now the failure on the side of the National Congress Party to implement the issue of Abyei is sending off signals. If that is not done, it can take us back to war.

I think these are the salient points that I think you can put your finger on, that really helped to bring the Comprehensive Peace Agreement. And then the issue, of course, of the Nuba Mountains and the southern Blue Nile, which represent the rule of Sudan in the marginalized territories, that these same issues can be resolved within the CPA. And that is why we are saying now, even with the issue of Darfur now, the CPA actually should be the process through which you can even resolve the problems of Darfur.

Q: You in a way touched this already, but what did you feel were the main challenges you faced in achieving your objectives?

A: The main challenges were really to have the stamina and the patience and the tolerance to continue talking to the National Congress Party, which was very intransigent and arrogant in its attitude, because they thought that they were powerful. And they really agitated and took every chance to try and break down the talks, but the patience that the SPLM, that we had, was very, very important. Two was also the perseverance of the mediators, the fact that they hung on, despite the ups and downs. I think they also encouraged us to continue talking to these people, because these talks would have broken down long, long before.

Even so, while people were talking and once you agreed on a ceasefire, then they would go again and bomb, break the ceasefire and this sort of thing. While people were talking, when people had agreed that in order to create a conducive atmosphere for talks, there should be a ceasefire. So there were acts on the other side which actually could have made the SPLM walk out of those talks, but I think the patience we had and the strength shown that we wanted a genuine solution, I think helped us to get them along, to come to a solution.

Q: Did you find that the focus of the negotiations were mainly on issues, or were there personalities and personality difficulties that came into play?

A: Mostly on issues. They were on issues, especially the issue of separation of religion and the state, which was counter to the heartbeat of the National Islamic Front dogma. That was their ideology and they could not see how they would have a secular country when actually Islamic fundamentalism is what brought them into power. Then the individuals who were involved, people like Turabi himself in the beginning, were very dismissive of whatever was being done, that through jihad, holy war, they would be able to win. And then there are a few hardliners among them, people like Dr. Ghazi Salah Al-Dine, you had people like Mutros -- not Mutros -- Mutros is quite moderate.

There are others like this guy, what do you call him, who is actually the assistant to the president, now, like Dr. Khalifa, for example. These are the hard core, which are beginning to surface now and that is why we see that there is this delay or a sort of deliberate sabotage.

Q: These are still not so much issues of personality as they are of issues, people that are bearing issues or ideological points of view.

A: Because they are ideological positions and they think they are being diluted by the CPA.

Q: Did you find that you encountered obstacles that you just could not overcome, and you had to move around them?

A: Yes, indeed. We had to move around them, definitely. There were areas where when we had a block there, then we would try another way.

Q: An end run?

A: Yes, in order to come back to what we had been trying to avoid.

Q: In hindsight, should there have been any difference in U.S. policies or practice during these negotiations? Were there points where you felt that the U.S., shall we say, wavered or did not provide leadership that it might have?

A: There were certain areas, especially in terms of the support for the SPLA. They were a bit bent on giving non-lethal support there, but when it came down to it, they said "Look, you cannot face this international terrorism, in which the present regime was the center, you cannot face it, unless you have counter-terrorism strength." And we thought that the United States government at that time did not come out to see the importance, why the SPLA should be strong, so that you can persuade these people to come to peace and agree on peace. I think that was one area in which the U.S. government policy should have been more forthcoming, and it was very, very serious, because the U.S. government wanted peace and you could not have that peace unless the other side saw the fact that they could not win militarily. The only way you could make them do that was to have a strong SPLA.

Q; Do you think that the U.S. involvement could have been more timely or there could have been increased involvement and would this have led to a more rapid conclusion?

A: Yes, I think so.

Q: There was a bit of foot dragging.

A: Foot dragging, when actually they should have moved as fast as now we see in Darfur, because the atrocities which were committed in southern Sudan by all these regimes were very brutal. In fact there was genocide going on, but everybody turned a blind eye. If they had moved faster, you would not have a Darfur now.

Q: In October 2002 Congress passed the Sudan Peace Act. Did you find that that had any effect on the peace process?

A: That was really a push to the peace process.

Q: In what way did it aid the peace process?

A: It aided the peace process because it sent a message to the regime that the most powerful nation on earth now is concerned and has got the legislative authority for them to act above the table on the issues of Sudan. And I think that sent them a signal, really sent them a signal and that was why they were coming around.

Q: If we could turn to implementation of the CPA, could you describe the primary shortfalls in the CPA that have led to problems with implementation?

A: The shortfalls are very clear. First is that the National Congress Party is not being truthful and committed to implementation of what we had agreed upon, by having a deliberate and selective, slow implementation on particular items within the agreement. Two, there are certain parts, like the Abyei Protocol, where nothing has been done. It has been two years now and nothing has been done about it. And on the issue of transparency in oil sharing, they have not moved.

The issue of the borders for the South needs to be determined. Why? Because this would make it possible for deployment of troops north and south of the border, so that the SPLA will move south of this border and the Sudan Armed Forces will move north of the border. Now they are dragging their feet. That is why, although they have withdrawn some of their troops from Equatoria and Bahr el Ghazal, they have dumped them in Upper Nile. And because the border has not been fixed, they say, "Well, we have moved our troops." But they are still inside the South, where they should not be. They should be north of the border. They still will not determine the border. This causes problems.

The issue of determining the oil fields: you cannot say which are the southern oil fields, because there are certain oil wells now which are considered to be in the North because the border has not been determined. So we are not getting a share from those oil fields. This is something they have not done.

The fact that there are certain laws that must be changed, which we have agreed on, the establishment of constitutional, human rights commissions and others. We find that there are certain laws that did not change. For example, Khartoum, which is the capital, where they are supposed to have minority populations and where we expect that it should reflect that it is the capital for all Sudanese, irrespective of their religion and all this. They have not moved yet. We are supposed to enact certain laws which would make it easy for the minority population.

Q: In other words, laws that would ensure the rights of minorities, whether they were religious minorities or tribal minorities?

A: Yes. So these are some of the things that they have not done.

Q: The CPA itself has been described as exceedingly complex. Is that your view, that the document itself with its protocols was too elaborate and that that is one of the reasons that implementation is difficult?

A: I think because it was too elaborate, it was too elaborate and very, very clear and detailed. It is an excellent document, such that if it were followed in spirit and letter, as people had signed it and agreed to, I think it would make a fundamental change in Sudan as a whole.

Q: So do you feel in hindsight that the agreement should have been simplified?

A: No.

Q: You are happy with it?

A: We are happy with it. If it were to be simplified, they still would not even move an inch. So it is better to be where it is. That actually helps us.

Q: Are there problems of implementation that stem from current circumstances that were not foreseen, or was everything fairly much foreseen?

A: Yes, there were certain things which were not foreseen. For example, in the implementation of the agreement, we have not actually foreseen that the role of the IGAD countries should have continued for the implementation period. Because what has happened now, really, is that as soon as we signed the agreement, it was assumed that the parties would be able to implement the agreement, but the IGAD countries just packed their bags, when they should have remained engaged.

Also, the fourteen signatories, as witnesses to the agreement, should also remain engaged, because the Assessment and Evaluation Commission is not enough, is not strong enough, because it has no force to see that what they recommend, that we are falling behind, what should be implemented, they have no power to enforce it, as the agreement requires. I think we did not foresee this but otherwise this has been a shortfall, really. That is why now we are coming back and saying, "Look, the international community must remain engaged. United States, you were leading this international coalition with commitment. That is why you signed as a witness, as the United States, to see that we receive implementation. Now the implementation is not going right and that is why we want the international community to come back in order to continue to have oversight in how we are proceeding."

Q: What do you think are the most important lessons to be learned from negotiating the CPA and the problems of implementation?

A: The most lessons to be learned in such a long conflict in which you have found a solution is that we must realize that it is not just the cessation of hostilities, that you sign a peace, have a ceasefire. That is not what people wanted. They needed much more than that and the pressure we are getting now. Our people think that when this peace process was signed and peace had come, it would mean for them development, that they would have clean water, that they would have roads, schools, clinics, absolute security, no more killing, all these sort of things. This actually is the real peace they were looking for, not just the cessation of hostilities. We have a permanent ceasefire where the peace dividends are not there.

I think in any peace process done anywhere, people must make sure that it is not enough that the belligerent parties sign and that they have agreed to a peace, that process will not be enough. People should go beyond, and see how the implementation will have gone and whether the victims of that war really are beginning to reap the benefits of peace.

Q: You would, in any case, recommend some sort of international commission to monitor the agreement, with enforcement powers?

A: Absolutely.

Q: That is what you would like to see?

A: Yes.

Q: You have touched on this already, but I want to ask to what extent did the peace process between North and South lay the foundation for violence in Darfur?

A: I think it did, because what actually happened, because the regime in Khartoum, the center, concentrated all the fruit and the good of the country in Khartoum, it was not only the South that was really marginalized. There were other marginalized areas, including Darfur and eastern Sudan. And when the people in Darfur saw that, "Well, look, now the South has got its rights, look at us, what do we have?" So when they started asking for their rights, you got that reaction. So I think that the peace dividend that was coming out of the South actually did wake up those from rural Sudan who were marginalized. They thought that they would now ask for their rights, and in the end they got themselves a bloody nose from the same regime.

Q: What model, then, from the CPA do you think could be applied to Darfur?

A: That is why I would say the concentration on talking, international political concentration on Darfur and humanitarian whatever in Darfur alone, is not the right way to go about it, because the CPA provides a forum through which you can get a solution for Darfur. An example is the solution we have for the southern Blue Nile and the Nuba Mountains. In fact, the issue of Darfur could be resolved in the same way. So the CPA is important and it can become the only vehicle in this country that can resolve the other conflicts which are coming up, like in the East. I am sure it can resolve the issue of Darfur.

Q: Would you like to make any other comments about the CPA and your role?

A: I am happy with my role in the CPA, because I am lucky to have lived to see that at least there is a peace process that will make a fundamental change in the lives of our people and to be a part of that, I think, is wonderful. It is wonderful because you can still see whether this peace and this plan you have spent time on for the last 21 or 22 years fighting for, that the rights of your people will be realized. For one to live to see that and be a part of it and to partake in seeing that this is delivered, I think, is very, very

satisfying. And that is why although there are bumps here and there, already we are beginning to see some changes in the lives of our people and that is very, very satisfying indeed.

Q: Are you seeing political changes occurring now in both the South and the North that you see as favorable trends?

A: Absolutely. Yes, political changes are happening, and you can see them very clearly, and this is what is worrying the National Congress Party in Khartoum. They see their lifespan as short lived in a way because of the political process and the waking up of rural Sudan and in the periphery and the fact that citizens are beginning to realize their rights. It is not enough to use a religious ideology in order to drag everybody along. I think change is imminent.

Q: If you could predict into the future, what do you think will happen in the elections next year?

A: If the elections are going to be free and fair, the fact that the SPLM has a lot of rallying points: the South, the Darfur region, the southern Blue Nile, the Nuba Mountains, the East--this is three-quarters of Sudan. In all these territories they support the view and the vision of the SPLM. So if the SPLM is to strengthen as a political party so that it can become competitive, it will not be a surprise if they become the majority party in the country, if the elections are free and fair.

But the guys who are ruling now, they are already thinking how to rig those elections. The preparation on the ground, like the census, like determining borders so that constituencies can be done, or the IDPs to return to their original homes, these are prerequisites that must be done so that you have a successful election. But these things now are being done with difficulty and some have not even been started. So shall we really have elections? That is the biggest question.

Q: If I can project even a little further into the future, if the referendum is allowed to take place in 2011, what do you predict at this stage will happen?

A: If it is going to be 2011 with the present attitude of the National Congress Party in helping to make unity attractive, they are actually making unity unattractive. Then they will be shocked to see that the majority of southern Sudanese will vote for a state of their own. They will have not seen the benefits of unity for the last six years. That is why the SPLM is saying, we will persevere to the end, we must make this unity attractive. If that is not done, so that there is a fundamental change in the life of the agreement and the country.

Q: Do you view yourself as an optimist or a pessimist in terms of Sudan's future?

A: I am an optimist. I view myself an optimist despite the problems. I think the Sudanese people are very, very resilient and have a lot of stamina. I am sure they can overcome a

lot of difficulties, with the help of others. That is why we need the role of the international community and particularly the role of the United States as one of the strongest nations on earth.

Q: Thank you very much for this interview, sir.

A: Thank you very much.