

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

**Interview # 43 –Executive Summary**

*Interviewed by: Beverly Zweiben*  
*Initial Interview date: November 6, 2006*  
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The interviewee is an official of an NGO working in Sudan since the 1970's. He notes that peacekeeping means that "peace is built, it's not the absence of conflict." Though his NGO is heavily involved in serving some of the basic needs of the people of Darfur, it works as well in South Sudan and in the Khartoum area, primarily in the areas of relief, water and sanitation, and agriculture. He acknowledges that security is a major consideration for his NGO, which frequently evaluates the relative merits of work in the region, in the context of security concerns. In this regard, regions such as Darfur have recently reached their lowest point of humanitarian access since 2004.

Though the NGO generally deals with Catholic counterparts, the activities are strong in non-Christian as well as Christian areas of the country. Where necessary, the NGO finds partner organizations in civil society which do not necessarily have religious affiliations.

One lesson learned in the process is that "an organization can't simply serve a displaced population. There has to be a balanced response in supporting also local communities." Local tensions will grow in areas where civil society is not fully engaged in humanitarian aid. Serving the needs of displaced persons alone does not help stabilize the society in the long run.

The interviewee finds Sudanese society more complex and more difficult to navigate than other countries of conflict, as, for example, Colombia. This is due to more rapidly shifting alliances and ethnic overlay among Arabs, Muslim Africans and Christian Africans in Sudan. Skin color and religion tell part of the story, but are two of many other elements, which sometimes add up to "treachery."

Though it would be preferable to have UN troops in contested regions such as Darfur, one cannot fault the African Union for inadequacy, given the modest means at their disposal. Should the UN have been sent into a mission with such meager means, it might have done no better than the AU.

Economic sanctions applied to pressure the Khartoum government seem to have had little or no effect. The interviewee strongly recommends bringing more nations into the process, and engaging in a more vigorous diplomacy, involving the Arab League,

China, and Malaysia. The appointment of U.S. envoy to Sudan is a positive step along the lines.

The interviewee's NGO strongly recommends the full implementation of the CPA, while seeing that many of the commissions established to bring the process forward have not met the challenges before them, for example the Abyei Boundary Commission (ABC). He cautions that failure to resolve the pending issues in Sudan could destabilize and already politically fragile region.

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*Q: Let me start out by asking about your association with Sudan and the Comprehensive Peace Agreement.*

A: My background is, I've worked with an NGO for 12 years. I've been covering Sudan, along with the Horn of Africa, since the month of July, from headquarters. That's the extent of my Sudan experience, I cover it very closely from headquarters. We have field operations, I know very well what they are. I know the people in the field very well, I worked with them elsewhere but I have not been to Khartoum yet, I haven't been anywhere in Sudan as of yet. So we're going on about four months of backstopping and advocacy experience from headquarters.

*Q: Well, can we start out first, can you tell me something about what your NGO does in Sudan?*

A: We have been working in Sudan since the 1970's. We have been supporting in the South for almost the entirety of that period, up until now. In the South we have a very large program. Traditionally it's been oriented towards meeting emergency needs: food, non-food, working with displaced and doing some rehabilitation and some peace-building work. In recent years we have been focusing more on the relocation, especially since the January 2005 signing of the CPA. We have been trying to change the direction of our program much more towards peace-building, conflict resolution, working with the different actors and also doing some relocation, all the while continuing to support emergency needs, as there's still amazingly large needs among the population. We currently have about a million beneficiaries of our program in the southern part of Sudan. Just to give an overview of all of Sudan, we opened a program in Darfur, starting with about 150,000 people, in the northern half of the state of West Darfur, mainly food and non-food items, but we're also doing nutrition, some shelter, some water and sanitation and some things such as seed fairs, agriculture and environmental training. We also do some modest programming around Khartoum, serving some of the displaced populations there. So that's a broad overview of what we're doing. In south Sudan, for example, we do a lot of water and sanitation, we're doing a lot of relief, a lot of agriculture. It's very rehabilitation oriented and we're still continuing to transition from emergency to relief.

*Q: I noticed in looking at your website that there are issues about security and I was wondering how much your work is constrained by security issues?*

A: In as much as humanitarian access is reduced, our activities are constrained. I just read a report today that the humanitarian access in Darfur is at its lowest point since 2004. We can reach roughly two thirds of the area only. So security is a concern, obviously, for our staff. Over a dozen humanitarian workers have been killed since the signing of the DPA in May. It causes us great concern. We have a particular viewpoint when we are in any country, Sudan especially, and that is that we have our local partner, which is the Church and issues of security, all issues are more or less taken in consideration in those conversations with them. So, for example, whereas another PVO may say, "We're going to analyze the security and we're going to judge whether to stay or leave depending on a number of factors" including perhaps some solidarity factors, but many of it is purely, "Is our work worth the risks that we're taking?" There's another huge category of factors in that and that is the Church thing, on the issue of security, on the issue of what type of work we should be doing. So we factor that in as well. Sometimes it boils down to the same, a similar decision to leave or to stay, but it is unique in that we are looking at it from some different points of view.

*Q: When you say that among the things that you have been engaged in is peace-building, what does that mean? How is that related to the CPA?*

A: It's not related to the CPA directly, although we are using some of the same mechanisms, some of the same structures that the CPA has set up. For example, the DDR commission, we are looking at some funding right now, an opportunity to work with the DDR. There's a Peace Commission and there's a Disarmament, Demobilization and I think it's Relocation Commission and we've been meeting with them, discussing what are some of the options to support in their work and our work. I don't know exactly what they do but I know that they'll be key. CRS's methodologies in peace-building are largely grass roots based and so as it is, they do center on working with the identity of peoples, talking about conflict. Basically peace is built, it's not the absence of conflict, so while conflict resolution is part of it, it does try to look at it from a more I guess Catholic point of view, more an overall panorama of building peace, actively building peace.

*Q: In the context of what you're trying to do, who are the basic players, in the totality of the work you're trying to do with Sudan? Who do you deal with? What Government people do you deal with?*

A: All programming sectors.

*Q: Do you deal with civil society? What does your world look like?*

A: I would say it differs. In the South, where the Catholic Church is a bit stronger, I would say the partner is the diocese, are our main partners. And we work with a multitude of other civil society and government partners as well. We do work very closely with the Government of South Sudan but I would say we're very involved in the South, since church structures are stronger we're able to work with the local development

arms of those churches. In the North, we also work very closely with Sudan Aid, which is effectively like the bishop's, it's like the national Caritas, the national social action arm. However, in Darfur the Catholic Church doesn't have many structures and we end up working with local communities, basically with civil society. Whatever structures are in place we seek them out, we explore what's there, have initial conversations, then start developing partnerships. So I would say in the Darfur area it's more with civil society and being operational to the extent that's necessary. That is our partnership *modus operandi*, which is that we will partner, to the extent that it's possible. And so one might think in certain emergency situations there's no one to partner with, when very often there is. And even in some developmental circumstances there's really few people to partner with and we'll have to become moderately operational. So it does vary for every situation. In West Darfur we are more operational than we are elsewhere.

*Q: And why is that the case? How does that happen?*

A: Why are we operational? Because there aren't a lot of large scale civil society organizations or Catholic organizations that, for example, in other places we might not even have an office. For example, we have an office in Al Junaynah with over a hundred staff. In other circumstances, if the Church were strong enough or if civil society were strong enough, we would partner with them. For example, when I was working in Rwanda post-genocide in 1994, I led a program that was more or less similar in size, 150,000 returnees to the southwest of the country, these were IDP's (internally displaced persons) and it was not necessary for us to be operational. We supported the local church development office, they carried out the distribution, they did the ration cards and all that. We supported them heavily, I attended their distribution, etc. but in that case, as I said, if CRS can pull back and work with local partners, we will and in cases where we can't, then we step in and are operational.

*Q: Is civil society mostly indigenous or from outside the country or the area? How does that work?*

A: Yes, I only talk about civil society when I'm talking about local committees that are formed. We have a mixture of staff in Junaynah, staff that are from Khartoum and they're basically, they're working in Junaynah but their families are still in Khartoum and we have our own staff. But I'm talking about local committees that help carry out the food distribution. There are several areas, for example, that we can't get to because of security reasons and what we've done is we've trained up these local food committees, led by local leaders, sheiks and others, there's an ample representation from women and especially from, obviously, the ethnic groups that are predominate in the area in order to carry out those distributions. So there are many times, especially when security gets difficult, that we're not even at the distribution. They've been trained, they have the materials, they know the procedures, they carry out the distribution, they know how to report on it and then we sit down with them either in Junaynah or in Kunguz or one of these other towns in the northern part of West Darfur in order to go over how it went and review the distribution. We don't like to do it just completely remote control and I

wouldn't describe it at all as remote control but, again, we rely as much as possible on civil society.

*Q: But you try to be engaged with them.*

A: Yes. And it's also, there are a number of other interesting things about it. One is that, a lesson learned from previous emergencies is that an organization can't simply serve a displaced population. There has to be a balanced response in supporting also local communities. Otherwise, local tensions will escalate. It's part of our peace-building outlook, in that, for example, back when I was in Rwanda I was actually living in a house with some Catholic doctors from Austria and they were serving a camp that had ballooned up to about 200,000 people.

*Q: That was initially intended to house how many?*

A: When I first arrived it probably had 40,000. There were probably two dozen camps around the area and the government were closing them and so half the people would go home and half would go to another camp. So this was one of the last ones closed. There were some other factors as well. But the doctors were doing primary, secondary and tertiary care. They were doing surgery in the camp when in the surrounding villages they didn't have primary health care. The upshot was, there's a lot of conflict. There's always very small conflict, a goat stolen here or there or someone tramples on some crops or something like that, trying to collect firewood. The conflicts were escalating but also you had a very big pull factor of people into the camps. Someone thinks, "I'm living half a mile away here. I can't get my kid seen by a doctor. I can get surgery if I declare myself a displaced person in that camp up there." And so that was part of why it ballooned.

So one of the lessons out of Rwanda and many of these emergencies is that you need to engage, in very general terms, engage in the host communities and in the best of circumstances provide some sort of support that they need, in some respect, for many reasons. Not necessarily to offset the costs of the fact that IDP's in a camp nearby and they're taking fuel, etc. but it's part of a comprehensive peace-building thinking, at any rate.

*Q: What kinds of things did you find brings people together in a common enterprise? What kinds of things might be counterproductive?*

A: You're referring to what?

*Q: As you're trying to bring together a collaborative effort in Sudan, what steps do you find are effective? What kind of advice would you give to someone? What kind of advice would you give to you, before you went to Sudan?*

A: I could answer in a general sense in Africa but not specific to Sudan and that's the topic of this conversation. So I would say probably I'm not the best.

*Q: Is Sudan that much different than other places you've worked in Africa?*

A: There are some pretty big differences. One is I haven't yet worked in an area that was still openly in conflict. I went to Rwanda post-genocide. It was conflicted, but not like Sudan, where you have just an open conflict at this point. I also haven't worked much in societies where there's a large Arab influence and so I would say that's probably a very big difference. I worked in the Sahel in West Africa, but there wasn't such Arab influence there. So I would say there's a number of factors like that.

*Q: What do you project is the impact of the Arab influence?*

A: Let me answer it this way, part of what I don't understand about the situation is the anthropology/ethnic factors. There is definitely an Arab/black African element to the conflict, although identities can be very shifting. I keep reading that that is a little bit changeable. On the one hand I understand it, there are some shifting factors in the Rwandan situation that I can identify with, such as the Hutu/Tutsi question, which honestly is about as vague as you can possibly imagine. They're not necessarily two ethnic groups. They're not necessarily two social groups. They're somewhere in between and someone can change from one to the other. It really is kind of a very gray issue.

But in Sudan the identity issue is very much linked with the conflict. Is a person Arab? The simple fact that someone is very dark skinned and perhaps even farming and etc., etc., doesn't mean that they're a black African, they're not Arab. Identities seem to shift a bit and that part of it I haven't seen as much in other parts of Africa, where you do have a bit of shifting identities, where they could change with a certain situation.

I would say the closest situation I've worked, as complex as Sudan, is Colombia, and Sudan is ten times more complex than Colombia.

*Q: In what way?*

A: Shifting alliances. They don't shift nearly as much in Colombia. You've got the paramilitaries, you've got the various guerilla groups. Sometimes some of the guerilla groups will make an alliance, sometimes they'll enter into conflict, but not that often. They don't want to weaken each other in front of the government, for example.

Whereas in Sudan, half or more of the damage done in the civil war was between different factions of the SPLA. So you have a lot more alliance shifting, a lot more what I would simply define as basic treachery. Alliances form but then, assassinations but I think that's a general characteristic of a situation that is much, much, more unstable. That is a characteristic, that you do have more shifting alliances and I think it'll be a key signal that things are improving when those alliances shift less. I'm not a political scientist but it seems to me that that is part of the political maturing process of a society is that ideas begin to take hold and people start to coagulate or convene around ideas and

ideologies, etc. In Sudan, you've got groups that form out of nothing but having similar grievances. And when they have to sit down at the peace table to talk, they may have little more to say other than, "We ought to have a say at the table and we've been done wrongly for this long" and they have. And then you'll have others that have a very well articulated political ideology thought out and it's articulated, they've got a constitution within the group, etc.

From my point of view, from a few situations I've seen, that's kind of one tell-tale sign, shifting alliances, as they shift more, it's a sign that things are getting worse, obviously, as rebel groups splinter, as the government is saying different things out of different people.

*Q: Looking at the situation in Darfur these days, would you say that the peace process contributed to what's going on in Darfur?*

A: I've read a lot on that issue in recent days. I think it has to be determined what we're talking about. Contributing to what, exactly? The percentage that it contributes to the escalation of violence?

*Q: Yes.*

A: I would say the answer to that question is the biggest factor in the escalation of violence is the factions that are carrying it out. The DPA did set forth a new fault line. Now, is that fault line any better or any worse than the first fault line? That's a matter of interpretation.

*Q: How do you mean?*

A: It's difficult for someone to make the argument that a peace accord made things worse. It was a valiant attempt. There were many things that went wrong with it. I think we're seeing a lot of deficiencies in the peace agreement right now. But did the actual peace agreement make things worse, is the cause of why the situation is today? No. It had an impact and of course it's going to leave its fingerprints on the overall situation. I have a hard time swallowing the argument that in and of itself it made things worse. It wasn't like it was a war agreement, or a pact between warring factions, although that's what it seems. It seems it was a pact between the SLA and the government. I'm just quoting others and I personally have a hard time swallowing such an argument.

*Q: Do you think there's a problem, what do you see as the impact of not having some external force implementing the peace agreement and leaving it to the various factions and the government to do that?*

A: The AU is there and they're a force and the AU is responsible for implementing the peace agreement. So your question is why isn't it stronger or why doesn't it have a better mandate?



*Q: Would it help if the UN were in there?*

A: Echoing what the bishops of Sudan have said, without a doubt the UN, deployment of UN troops is a better solution. In some respects we can say there has been a bit of, I wouldn't go so far as to call it hypocrisy but handing a certain amount of money to the AU and a certain level of training and then criticizing them because they did a terrible job, when experts say that they didn't have enough troops on the ground and then saying, on the other hand, "The UN could do a better job" because it's talking about 20,000 troops, has a higher capacity, has a lot more money, etc., etc. But it makes one wonder if all that money had been given to the AU, if the AU had a mandate for 20,000 troops and had all the technical training, logistics, communications, etc., etc., etc., would they be doing such a bad job today?

*Q: You think that they were underfunded and undersupplied?*

A: They were definitely underfunded. They definitely didn't have enough troops. Yes, the mandate was the one part where the AU could have provided a stronger mandate, although I think it is a very valid question to say. "Please don't criticize the AU," as a dichotomy of AU versus UN. What if we compared it the other way around? What if we gave the UN the same amount of money that the AU was given, give them the same mandate, the same number of troops and all that and then compare them to a 20,000 strong AU contingent with five times the money, five times the equipment, all the logistics and everything. In some respects it's a very, very unfair comparison and honestly I find the criticism of the AU, much of it I think is overblown. It hasn't been nearly as effective as people expected but given the benefit of the doubt, why don't we give them the same amount of money, why don't we ask that they beef up to 20,000 troops, why don't we ask the UN to give them a lot more?

Now the AU themselves have said they want to leave. They themselves have said, "We would like to transition out and let the UN take over."

*Q: And why is that the case?*

A: I can only report from what I've read, which is that this is their first peace-keeping mission and it hasn't been the success that they wanted. Their troops are beleaguered.

*Q: Given your experience in the region, how do you interpret what you're reading, for example with regard to Sudanese attitudes toward America?*

A: I would say our field operation hasn't experienced anything necessarily anti-American. There's the dynamic between the Khartoum government and anybody who wants to lay a set of eyes on how the situation is going, whether it be journalists or what have you. I can say that I have no information other than what I read in the news but as far as how they view Americans, the bishops, I should say, view Americans, the U.S. bishops, as very key, the element of solidarity and dialogue and transparency, it's very key. And it's those types of, I would say, spaces that we interact very frequently.

*Q: If you look at sanctions as a weapon, or efforts to reengage with the various parties on the ground, how would you weigh those two? The Clinton Administration employed sanctions as a way of influencing the government.*

A: I don't really have any comments on sanctions, other than that, in the New York Times a couple of weeks ago was an article, "Sanctions? What Sanctions?" There are layers and layers of sanctions currently, so one could argue that they haven't had near the impact that was intended by those who implemented them.

In terms of a general diplomacy recommendation, we feel that increased diplomacy is needed, especially now, in order to stop the violence and resolve the conflict. The U.S. could engage the Europeans more, could engage, especially the Asians, the Chinese, the Malaysians, etc. and could engage part of the Arab League. We're very happy to see the U.S. name a special envoy in September. He's been there and back. We've been discussing, interacting in fora where he's spoken. We think that a high level, intensified diplomacy is needed right now. It's difficult to say how much leverage the U.S. has in Sudan currently. Some say they have none. I would say they certainly have limited leverage. So I think diplomacy is, much more diplomacy, engagement of regional actors. That's the main route.

*Q: Now when you say that our leverage is, at least at minimum, limited, why is that the case?*

A: That's what people on the ground are telling us. When I read that certain sectors are booming in the country when we've got layers and layers of sanctions and also our relations just appear to be not producing nearly as much as they should in terms of peace on the ground. We have a special envoy. We've had a lot of speeches, but the violence rages on. So just from some simple facts one could state that but also the U.S. has used a combination of carrots and sticks and what has worked? What has changed behavior? What has produced results on the ground? People are being massacred right now.

*Q: Do you think that the CPA has credibility? One argument is that it's become a benchmark, that no matter what happens in the next six years that the CPA will be the reference point for whatever happens in the future.*

A: I haven't been part of discussions in which that was discussed at length. The discussions I have had, which I guess are more in some of the Catholic circles, besides the Washington, D.C. coalitions, I guess the one phrase that gets repeated often is that peace is indivisible in Sudan. And the interlinkages between the various agreements, the DPA, the CPA and I don't know what they're calling the agreement now with the Eastern Front but they're all closely linked and so I think it would be unwise to think that the DPA's could unravel or die completely and that would have no implications on the CPA. I think it will. Even if an observer looks at who is supporting the DPA, who is supporting UN troops, who is supporting this, that or the other, in the GNU, the Government of National Unity, it's pretty clear that the split isn't random. One can argue that it's driving

a wedge, that the issue of troop deployment, for example, is driving a wedge in the government. So the bishops have clearly stated that they want to see the CPA fully implemented, that many of the commissions are not doing the work they need to be, the Abyei Commission in particular and also the revenue sharing. I wouldn't say much more about the CPA.

*Q: Do you have a sense of why the bishops feel the commissions aren't working as effectively?*

A: As I understand it, the primary thing about Abyei is to get a functional government in there and there isn't and the commission's not really making headway on the issues. Abyei's a very critical area. Many say that where Abyei goes so goes the country. So I think it's an issue to watch. I think, indicators on how the CPA's doing, I think Abyei, for us, would be probably either at the top of the list or very high up. And we share the bishops' concerns that the CPA is more than a ceasefire agreement. It's a peace agreement that requires all parties to carry out certain actions. And when those actions aren't taking place it's disquieting.

*Q: When will you be going to Sudan?*

A: Possibly next month.

*Q: To stay there or for how long?*

A: I'll be going there for just a few weeks. I backstop and also I do advocacy on Sudan.

*Q: What does that mean?*

A: I work within our coalition. All the backstopping is just ensuring that whatever is needed in headquarters, we do strategic planning, work with our field staff to make sure that we're on the same page on certain decisions and that information flows between our leadership and our people in the field are fairly smooth. On the advocacy end, we work with, there's an Interaction Sudan working group, there are many organizations that are doing advocacy on Sudan. We participate in meetings and work out policy plans. Part of it, much of it, again, focused around the bishops and their engagement with the U.S. government and our bishops' engagement with the Sudanese bishops. So it's a lot of things rolled up into one that keeps my day very busy.

Projects, for example, are approved at the level of the East African Regional Office. And so, if we have instructions, it's more, "We'd like to know your thinking on this issue. Help us understand the local situation and where we're going with that." And even the advocacy work that we support here, the mantra is advocacy needs to be grounded on in the field reality, meaning we're not running off here developing policy positions ourselves. They're grounded in what's going on in the field and what our field people are telling us. And so that from the field person up to the director there in country up to the regional director to myself and to my bosses and colleagues around the office

here we're all on the same page and there's a pretty healthy debate that goes on. So as far as guidance that goes out in the field, much of it is just to make sure we understand what we're doing, what the logic is and how that fits in to some of the other actions that are going.

A lot of these conflicts are, I'd say virtually all of them, are regional. If you look at the Horn of Africa, you've got Somalia that's tense these days, you've got Eritrea and Ethiopia, their border, but also there's an issue of their support of each side of the Somali conflict. You've got Somali refugees flowing over into Kenya. So we're trying to look at this from a regional perspective. I guess the most significant things that come out of here are just some pretty straight questions: What is our thinking? What are we doing about the Somali refugees flowing into Kenya? What is our contingency planning if we have to evacuate from West Darfur? So guidance often comes in the form of just questions. What are we thinking in terms of this?

Also, it's useful to state that strategic planning takes place every couple of years, as well, especially in an emergency context. That takes place, instead of five years, like every 18 months to two years. So that's where a lot more directives, guidance, etc., are involved, especially with our leadership in headquarters. The day to day, month to month programmatic decisions, they're made at a country and regional level.

*Q: And are there major problems or issues that you're trying to address, or do they tend to be kind of local things? But are there major issues that you see relating to the Sudan situation?*

A: From an operational point of view?

*Q: Yes.*

A: You mentioned earlier security. The security of our partners, our staff, of Church staff. We're forever doing a recalculation of the benefit of being there versus the risks that we're running and the risks that our staff are running, the risks that our partners are running, adding in all the elements of our identity, of solidarity, etc., etc. So, yes, the security situation, as you know, evolves very quickly, in the North, as well as in the South. The recent shootings near Juba, that affects our programming. It has ramifications on how we carry on our activities. I would say security is one of those larger factors. We do try to function always with a fairly cooperative understanding with the government and so, like I said, there's just a lot of factors that go into how easy it is to carry out programming. But security's probably our biggest concern.

*Q: And relationships with government people?*

A: Yes, as well.

*Q: And does that change?*

A: Yes, for instance requirements have changed recently regarding NGO's. Our relationship with the government has been good, continues to be good, despite new requirements that have been made and new restrictions on certain types of visas. You have this 25-mile restriction to Khartoum that's affected us, as well as it's affected everyone.

*Q: You can't go beyond a 25 mile radius?*

A: Right.

*Q: It would really be interesting to talk to you again after you get back, to see if any of your views change or how they're sharpened by actually being on the ground.*

A: I would welcome that.