

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

Interview # 47 - Executive Summary

Interviewed by: W. Haven North
Initial interview date: December 12, 2006
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The interviewee is a Southern Sudanese who has been lobbying for peace in Sudan for 21 years. He has traveled extensively in the U.S., Europe and New Zealand “lobbying all the time” to “bring the war in the south to world attention and take action on the Government of Sudan.” He wanted the international community to know that it was not just religious differences but racist—“to extinguish the black race.” The interviewee has started a Peace Village in Kuron with people from four or five different tribes and different religions; they are living peacefully. The village has a small school where small groups can be molded to be the future of Sudan.

The international community and African countries -- Inter-Governmental Action Group on Development (IGAD) -- pressed the North and South to negotiate. But even now Khartoum is looking for the weak points in the international community and America, in order to violate the agreement, which it has already done.

Very little is being done to implement the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA); Darfur has drawn the attention of the international community away. The people in the South, Nuba Mountains and south Ingressana Hills are desperate; no development seems to be going on there: infrastructure destroyed, lack of water, no roads, no hospitals, no schools. The Khartoum government is dictating to the South. A lot of bribery is going on to exploit the people and keep them ignorant. There is a need to settle the people -- 4 million in the North and a lot of refugees; these are the people who are going to vote in 2011 on the referendum; they have not come home.

The strength related to the CPA is that at least the South has an administration from which they can start, but they are powerless. The greatest weakness is the lack of capacity building for human resources.

The people of Darfur are fighting for their rights, their dignity, their integrity; Darfur came because of the movement in the South. Some of the soldiers of the Southern People’s Liberation Movement (SPLM) should be incorporated in the African Union peacekeepers to strengthen them.

The militias are now unnecessary; there should be only the Sudan government and the SPLM army. The Sudan government is paying the militias an enormous amount of money.

Since the peace agreement, the war has stopped; but stopping the war is not enough. The people are impatient to see the results of stopping the war, which broke out because people were left without land, without anything and even the little they had has been destroyed. Lack of visible progress will sow the failure of the CPA.

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Q: Let's start off some context for the interview by your describing your position and your association with the Comprehensive Peace Agreement negotiations. What is your position and what is your association with the CPA?

A: On my association with the CPA, I am a southern Sudanese where the war has been fought for so many years for the liberation of the people of southern Sudan. Of course now, it is not only southern Sudan, but the war has been extended to the Nuba Mountains (before in the North and now together with the South) and to the Ingessana Hills people of Blue Nile, who also joined the movement for their liberation. So it is wider than southern Sudan. During the 21 years of the war, I was one of those who lobbied for peace. I was invited by the U.S. Institute of Peace to a meeting in Cairo in 1991. I continue to be closely associated with the U.S. Institute of Peace.

During these 21 years, I have been to America seven times to lobby for peace in Sudan; I went all over Europe, to Australia, South Africa and New Zealand; especially about the oil issue. We even managed to get Talisman out of Khartoum to not continue producing this oil, which was providing funds for killing the people of the South. So I was lobbying to find a peaceful solution, because we know that nobody can win a war by guns. We have been lobbying, lobbying, all the time.

I was imprisoned by both sides during these years of the war; in 1965, I was imprisoned by the Sudanese government, and in 1989, I was imprisoned by the Sudan Peoples' Liberation Movement (SPLM), because I was helping to save the lives of people in the town of Torit; they said I was feeding the enemies of the government. But thanks to God, they did not kill me, but they imprisoned me for one hundred days. With the intervention of the international community three priests — one French, one Sudanese, one Irish and I (a Sudanese) were released, because of the pressure of the international community and especially America.

We struggled to start the peace process within the rebel movement, because the movement had factions. Then, we managed to get the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD) involved. When I went to New York in 1991, I was lobbying to bring Sudan and the war in the South to the attention of the world community to have it take action on the Sudan government. While lobbying in 1991, I was told to "involve the African countries, we cannot come without the African countries." That is why IGAD

started. So I had a hand in this Comprehensive Peace Agreement. Once when I was in New York talking to young children, I said, "There is war in Sudan." They told me, "Wow!" I said, "Nobody can win a war." That is why we have been lobbying for a peaceful solution.

Q: When you were lobbying, was there something specific you were lobbying for, or was it just in general?

A: We were involved in the war because the war in Sudan and southern Sudan, in the beginning was not like Darfur now, which is widely known. No news; it was a forgotten war. There was not a door to go in. So we wanted to open the eyes of the international community to know that there is genocide, and that they were just being silent about it; that was one thing we were talking about. Many people were really naive. They did not know the difference between Khartoum, Islamic fundamentalists and Southern Sudan. They did not know, but we wanted to make them aware of the situation, so that they would know the difference, telling them that it was not really about religion.

The powerful people were using religion; even the fundamentalists are seeking power. When you go to the grassroots, the Moslems and Christians at the grassroots are innocent people. They do not have that concept. But it is the powerful ruling people who are causing this crisis. So we wanted to bring an awareness to the international community, but also for them to know that it is not only religion; it is something racist, because they want to extinguish the black race, in the name of Islam, to Arabize Sudan. So we wanted make them aware, to teach people to understand the liberation of people in marginalized areas and what they are looking for. Actually the people from Darfur and the Nuba Mountains and Ingessana Hills were used as soldiers to fight the South in the name of Islam. They used the Moslems to kill the people from the South in the name of Islam, but this was not really Islam. It was to extinguish the black race.

Q: What is your understanding of why the North and the South finally agreed to come together and negotiate?

A: First, it was the pressure of the international community. Of course, we know that—I am sorry to say—most of Khartoum's money and weapons were coming from Islamic fundamentalist countries. This is what we know. But they came to the negotiating table because of the pressure of the international community. That is why we went all over the world lobbying, to make the international community, the world be united to stop the genocide. Because by being united, it is easier to stop the genocide. Alone we could not, because we were being called "toothless barking bulldogs." And they still today consider southern Sudan the property of their grandfathers, who caused the slavery in the South. So they call us "property." It is better to be called an enemy than be called property.

Q: So the two sides finally did come together to agree to negotiate, is that right?

A: Yes, we got some peace. The African countries, the IGAD, came together, supported by the international community, especially America to bring pressure. Even now

Khartoum does not recognize the agreement. It has been forced to; but it is looking for the weak points in America or the international community in order to violate the peace. Actually, they have already violated it. They are still paying the militia to dismantle the peace. They have already violated it with the recent fight in Malakal; also a few people were killed on the way to Nimule and to Yei, and they burned some vehicles a few miles from Juba. These militias are all bandits being paid by the Sudan government.

Q: On the negotiation process, were you following that closely and how did that proceed? What helped it move along?

A: Very little is being done, because the issue of Darfur has diverted most of the attention of the international community who have been lobbying for peace in southern Sudan. Darfur has really drawn attention away. That is why I am telling this time and again. You are all forgetting about monitoring the Comprehensive Peace Agreement. It is already a cold war. The people in the South, in the Nuba Mountains and the south Ingessana Hills are desperate, because no development is going there. Everybody puts its efforts on Darfur. The people have been suffering: all of the infrastructure has been destroyed: no water, no roads, no hospitals, no schools. And nothing is being done because the international community is talking about Darfur, which is bringing about another war in the South. If the peace that has been signed is going to be violated, what is the use of stopping the war in Darfur? The government will say: "They have not seen what has happened in the South." So if the South becomes strong, the people will see the meaning of peace, even the trouble that we have had in Darfur can be meaningful.

Q: Let us go back a minute to the actual negotiation process. Are you familiar with how that went? Why it was able to work, the actual negotiation between the North and the South?

A: It took time. Because of my work with the church, I was not fully involved. However, we have been involved in writing letters, bringing up some points. We were not fully, directly involved, but the church has been working behind the scene through the Council of Churches.

Q: When you speak of "we," whom are you referring to?

A: We have the Catholic Church; we have an ecumenical group, all working together. We are not talking as individuals.

Q: Then with the agreement signed in January 2005, how would you assess the implementation of this agreement?

A: Nothing. I do not see any implementation going on, except that there is a government in the South. But I see that the Khartoum government is beginning to dictate to the government of the South, as it did with the Addis Ababa agreement. So I do not see that freedom is being given to the South. The people in the South would like to have their wishes met by the government in the South. There have been some conflicts, because the

South wanted the UN peacekeepers to go to Darfur when the government said no; there has been great tension because of this. Those are some of the examples I can give you.

Q: To what extent are the people in the South aware of the CPA agreement and its various provisions?

A: The people are aware, but all of the promises have not been fulfilled. Many promises have been made between the North and the South and all of these promises have been broken. We see that a lot of promises are not fulfilled. These broken promises frustrate the people in the south.

Q: And then there is supposed to be elections coming up in a couple of years. Are the people preparing for that?

A: The people are not preparing, because of the destruction going on in Darfur. The Church is trying its best, but the Church alone cannot do enough.

Q: And then there is supposed to be a referendum in 2011. Is there any preparation for that?

A: That is another thing I have been saying; there is not much preparation going on. At present, you cannot get people prepared when they have no house, no place to settle. Even going in Juba, many people are sleeping in tents. So the people are thinking of their pain. To prepare, people must have an easier life. No roads, even. How can there be travel from one place to another to enlighten the people? The roads are awful.

Q: Do you have any sense of how the South will react or respond to the referendum?

A: I do not know, really; the people know what they are going to say. I cannot tell yet, but I think the people know what they want. The people are frustrated; they not provided with any services so that they can say no to self-determination; they do not see any change. The government in the South is unable to provide services even now. I do not know if it is because they are unable to. So we are asking; if we want the election in 2011 to be strong, the people have to be empowered now, to be prepared and provided with some development.

The war came to an end, because we were behind the [peace] movement; we were providing a lot of development. If we were to continue with the development, the small development that the Church was providing as a hope to the people, the people would know that now they can stand up. But if they are shown, that by not answering all of their needs, that the only salvation is to have a northern Sudan, the government in Khartoum, then that will cause a lot of confusion. That is the situation as I see it on the ground.

That is why I say: whoever is interested in the 2011 outcome should think of settling the people. Here we have more than two million refugees in the North. Two years have elapsed, and they have not yet come home; the people who are going to vote.

Q: Before we go on to some other points, if you looked at the CPA as a whole, the agreement itself and its implementation, what do you see as some of the strengths or the weaknesses of that agreement?

A: The strength is the present situation; at least the South has an administration and a structure from which it can start. The weakness is that it is powerless. It is being dictated to from the North. That is the greatest weakness. Also capacity building for the people on the ground, people should be provided substantial human resources capacity building, because many intellectuals have been killed, many are in the diaspora and many are refugees. We need this capacity to be built, but I do not see it; it is too slow and that is one of the weaknesses.

Q: You have been associated with the setting up of a truth and reconciliation commission, is that right?

A: Yes, we have done a lot, even now. That is why I founded my Peace Village. We have started reconciling people from the grassroots; we have also sent people to be trained for justice and peace, truth and reconciliation in South Africa. Many countries are trying very hard to do that. We have created justice and peace offices. That is why I retired, actually, from being the administrator of the diocese, to have this Peace Village, to have workshops, trauma healing. That is how we are encouraging....

Q: These Peace Villages are actually villages in...

A: There is only one Peace Village. I do not even have funds for building it; the strongest thing we have for that is the internet.

Q: This is the village at Kuron, right?

A: Kuron, yes, we have the internet.

Q: What are you trying to do in Kuron?

A: I saw this example when I was in Israel, a very small cooperative, where a small group of Israelis, the Jews, the Christians, and the Moslems live together. Everyone who goes for a pilgrimage or for a visit to Jerusalem, to Israel, goes to see this example. There was a small town, which was founded by the British where I grew up; they brought people from all parts of Sudan to study. We who grew up there knew no tribalism. So I wanted to set a small flame of this type in Sudan. I am now seventy years old. I hope, if God gives me health, I can create this community and others, because the dream has been started, the vision has been started, but other people can continue with the vision.

Q: And in your village of Kuron do you have different faiths, different groups?

A: It was a very peaceful place, because the government could not come there. It is between the border with Ethiopia and the border of two Sudanese regions: Upper Nile and Equatoria. No bombs, nothing has been there before, it is in the jungle. When I built a bridge there to connect two regions, people went and settled there. Some pastoralists came there, about eighty families settled in that place, near the bridge. We started a small demonstration farm so they could be taught there. They settled there. When I retired I started from that small group and now we have at least four or five different tribes who came, some families who came. We are still building. My idea is to bring at least one family from the different areas. That is my dream.

Q: Are they from different religions, too?

A: Yes, from different religions. That is where I started. When I settled there during the war, I founded a school for girls and boys; there are now 700 girls from 24 different tribes. I also founded a school for boys; there are about 600 boys from about 24 different tribes. They are living peacefully. If I did this during the war, why not succeed now? I can bring students from all different parts of Sudan and start a small school. Instead of calling it international, call it national, where we can mold these small groups to be the future of Sudan.

Q: And these groups are working together well? There are no conflicts?

A: They are working well. In the school, they are from all religions, Moslems, Christians, traditional and they are all there. Catholics, Protestants, they are all there. They are not from only one denomination. They are living so peacefully, run by the sisters who are teaching them. They are very happy.

Q: And you envision having these villages developed in other parts of southern Sudan?

A: Some things start very small. In 1974, after the signing of the Addis Ababa agreement, I was the first to found an ox plow school in one of the areas. Then they sent people from all over Sudan to learn ox plowing. Now in southern Sudan, there are many people using oxen. But I started it in a very, very small mission, with two oxen, trained in Uganda and brought them to Sudan. Now, there are cattle all over. I have hope for this Peace Village, if God gives me time until it is settled, but it is already a starting point.

Q: How can the international community help you with your villages?

A: This year 15 girls visited from Norway and when they saw that I was teaching school under the trees they went back and raised \$35,000 to start a small nursing school. So even the school I started, I started under a tree. So when people say, "What do you want us to do?" I say, like Jesus, "Come and see." When they came and saw. I started in 1995 under a tree. Now this school has become a big town. So I ask the people always, "Come and see. Join me." Seeing the suffering, seeing the truth, seeing what is going on on the ground, then they can answer.

Q: Are there specific things that the international community could do to help with your program?

A: What I am looking for is a conference center; we need to build a conference center. And then after the conference center, we need at least a school, because you cannot bring people there without a school for their children. Every family needs the future of their children. I need a school. I need to have a health center. I need a place for the community to build their own village. We have already surveyed it. We have places where we could have community development, women's programs and so on.

Q: Do you envision multiplying or duplicating these villages in other parts of Sudan?

A: There is no need. I just want to do a small thing well. I am not going to scatter my efforts immediately. We can invite people from different areas of conflict, but I am not going to go on to scatter my efforts. Even for this small one I have found difficulties in finding funds. So I want just a small thing. There is a book, *Small Is Beautiful*.....

Q: Let us turn to another point you raised earlier. This is the problem that Darfur is presenting, both directly and for the implementation of the CPA. What is your view about how there could be reconciliation in that part of the country?

A: Reconciliation is not possible, unless we see that the reconciliation we have done is done well. If you want to pass from one reconciliation to the other, you build a house and the other is falling down behind and you want to build another, but even the one you have built is falling, what capacity have you? We have to see that what we have done is going well and then we continue ahead and all of us join in. Because I see that Darfur came because of the movement in the South, the people are fighting for their rights, their dignity, integrity and so that is how the others also learned. They have to see that help given to this area is going to succeed, so that they also can succeed.

Q: But anything specific that could be done or should be done to help ease the Darfur situation?

A: We have some answers that the Darfur situation can... if the southerners are already strong, they should come and speak out that we want our brothers and sisters to be free and we want to participate in peace keeping in Darfur. Any foreigner can be deceived; we know what is on the ground; we can speak the language. Some of the people in the southern Nuba Mountains and the Ingessana Hills ought to be involved, because they know exactly what is going on now. Any lies that are told, they know that they are a lies. Whatever is said in Arabic, somebody may say, "No," you may say that he has said, "Yes." So we need the involvement of the people who have been suffering where they have signed a peace [agreement]; they should be involved in the peace making. Even some of the soldiers of the SPLM, Ingessana Hills, Nuba Mountains should be [incorporated into] the African Union [peace keepers] to strengthen them. I think that is what I would ask.

Q: They would be added to the African Union group to...?

A: They should be added, because they know what is happening. They know exactly the roads, how to deal with the people, to speak to the people; they know what is true and not true. The international community cannot save the people of Darfur without involving the people who are seeking peace also in Sudan. That is what I see.

Q: Let us turn to the overall southern Sudan situation, in terms of building up the capacity of the government and the local organizations to carry out development. How is that progressing?

A: Yes, we need more effort. We need human resources. When I came they said, "Please, may the international community, America, support encourage those people in the diaspora to come and help us." But they cannot come unless they are also empowered by the people with whom they have been living. They could come with some friends to empower the human capacity on the ground, not only the government but also with us in the Church. That is what we look for.

Q: What specific types of help would be most appropriate from the international community, to help build up the southern capacity?

A: I think capacity building is developing civil society, because the war has destroyed all the people who are technicians; most of them have been destroyed by war or they have escaped overseas. The rest of the people who have remained have been militarized with no education for so many years. Everybody was thinking of war.

Q: So what specifically could the international community do to help strengthen the South?

A: Some volunteers. We need money, but money alone is not enough. When our boys come here, I say, "Do not go empty handed. Carry tools around with you." And then some did not know the meaning of tools. They thought that I told them to collect some hammers, some hoes. I said, "No, you have to build the capacity of your brain, of technology and to [plan] to provide projects, carry out planning." These are some of the things we need.

Q: I understand that there is still some inter-group fighting in the South itself. There are militias there.

A: Yes.

Q: What can be done about that?

A: I do not know. Even for those who have signed the peace [agreement], what does it mean, militia, if the name "militia" is still there? It means the war is still there. The militia is trained to fight. They are unnecessary, because now there should be only the

Sudan government army and the SPLM army and the united army. This name “militia” should disappear, but the Sudan government still pays southern Sudanese who are with them, giving an enormous amount of money, which the South cannot pay even to their soldiers. That is so people will remain in their positions.

Q: And this is the northern government that is providing funds to those southern groups?

A: Paying some of these groups and these people called militia, where are they getting their money? They are getting it from the Sudan government. And that is what I am asking, that the UN, the international community should look into this very seriously.

Q: What are some of the other dimensions of the situation in southern Sudan that should be considered by this study?

A: ...The warmongers will not be killed, but will kill innocent people. Let us find a peaceful solution, in order to save the lives of the people. But it seems we are stopping this at the cost of the innocent Sudanese who are being killed in their villages. We still are appealing to the international community, the UN, if possible the peace keepers, the numbers should be increased, even in southern Sudan, especially eastern Equatoria, on the village level and the county level, not only in the towns like Torit, Juba, Yei. Then the people will be ready to come back even from refugee camps and start settling. So the only thing is to see that the peacekeepers are aware and protect the lives of the innocent people in those areas. But we would not like to have a military solution to bring that about.

Q: That would involve a very large number of peacekeepers, would it not?

A: Maybe, there can be a few, but with them, let them give some SPLM/SPLA people, give them some finance, get some people to join with them. There are a lot of SPLA who are not employed now, because there are too many of them, there are too many soldiers. Why not form some of those as peacekeepers in the South? Communities ought to be also empowered for peace keeping. Even if there are ten, twenty UN personnel put among fifty or one hundred of these people, they can keep the peace better, as a kind of Peace Corps. These are some of the things I would suggest. Actually, in the South, we do not need too many peacekeepers from the outside. They could train; there are human resources from the remnants of the SPLM/SPLA that could be trained for this issue, not for fighting but for joint activities, maybe you provide only one leader as the commander over these people, they can do it. These are some of the ideas.

Q: Are there some other ideas that you would like to put forward on the peace process?

A: Yes, I would like to appeal, actually to give hope to the people of marginalized areas like the South, Nuba Mountains, Abyei and the Ingessana Hills, to bring development, because as Pope Paul VI said, “Development is peace.” I think that is my conviction.

Q: If you look over the process of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement and its implementation, are there some things that stand out to you as lessons or things that should have been done or have not been done, in terms of that negotiation and agreement process?

A: I see that at present, since the peace has been signed when we were enthusiastic, the war is stopped. But stopping war alone is not enough. We want the result of stopping this war; why the war broke out is because people were left without land, without anything and even the little they had has been destroyed. And so I do not see that this development is coming back, so far. So keeping it like it is will sow the failure of the CPA. That is what I can say.

Q: Is there something we have not covered or touched on that you would like to add?

A: The bee has collected the pollen and then you make the honey. Collect all this pollen now.

Q: Good analogy. We thank you so much.