

Locating responsibilities: national and international responses to the crisis in Darfur

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Abstract

The debate about who is doing what for Darfur and who is responsible for the grotesque human suffering has been going on for the last four years. This debate is paralleled with mad human suffering that has also been going on in Darfur; without hopeful or credible attempts to seek an end to it. A lot of initiatives were put forward but so far all these initiatives are stalled. Even the Darfur Peace Agreement (DPA) that was hailed by the international community at the time of its conclusion could only make things worse. This paper aims at locating responsibilities for the escalation of the crisis in Darfur. It does so by looking at national and international responses to Darfur, as well as explaining some local level dynamics that are part and parcel of the escalation. Two main arguments underline the paper: first, local level dynamics and complexities in Darfur go way beyond simple notions of competition between nomads and farmers over land and water resources; notions that are conveniently popularized by the Sudanese governments. Second, all the three key players; Sudan government, the international community, and the armed movements, are responsible for the escalation and the stalemate of the peace process. Added to these two compounding factors, the “politics of naming;” of whether what is happening in Darfur is genocide or not, has been a confusing question. The response of the Sudan government has been dodgy and complacent throughout the crisis, and continues to be fuzzy until hitherto. Lack of seriousness, denials, and belittling the crisis in Darfur, is the main response of the government to the crisis. The absence of tools and structures available to the international community to address internal crises made the world look complicit, and thwarted its attempts for peaceful settlement. Divisions along tribal lines and lack of political clarity among leaders of the armed movements resulted in splinter groups that take advantage of the situation and perpetuate human suffering. It is suggested that a unity of purpose among the different armed groups must be forged if efforts for a peaceful settlement are to succeed.

Introduction

There is no doubt that the crisis in Darfur represents one of the worst humanitarian tragedies that followed the 1990s crises in Rwanda and the Balkans. The Rwandan genocide took place under the guise of the whole world and it was already too late when the international community intervened. One lesson drawn from that crisis was that the international community should not wait until genocide is committed. But has that lesson been learned? Unfortunately, the Balkan and the Darfur crises show that it has not. It took a long time before the international community led by NATO forces intervened and stopped the atrocities in the Balkans. The NATO also intervened against former Yugoslavia and averted a possible genocide against Kosovo Albanians. Approximately one decade after the Rwandan and Balkan crises, the Darfur crisis

unfolded and represented a glaring challenge to both the Sudan and the international community. The response of the Sudan government has been dodgy throughout the crisis, and continued to be fuzzy until hitherto. Lack of seriousness, denials, and belittling the crisis in Darfur are the main response of the government to the crisis. It was only when conditions on the ground could not be kept hidden anymore that the government acquiesced to the mounting pressure and acknowledged that indeed there is a serious problem. The response of the international community was mainly brought about by the appalling images of debris and burned villages, which were one of the main characteristics of the conflict. Both national and international responses to the crisis in Darfur are, at best, flawed and, at worse, complacent.

The half-hearted engagement of the Sudan government and the confused intervention of the international community resulted in the signing of Abuja agreement (DPA) in March 2006. The agreement has not brought positive changes to the lives of people in Darfur, fell short of addressing the root causes of the problem, and did not satisfy the aspirations of internally displaced persons and refugees. On the contrary, it led to further divisions within Darfur, with one rebel faction signing; and others staying out.

This paper attempts to provide an explanation as to why both responses are flawed and/or complacent. Since the crisis already received a lot of scholarly attention, particularly with regard to the causes that underlie it (cf. Mohamed et al 2003, Mohamed and Bedri 2004, Ahmed and Manger 2006), I would not say much about it. I will, instead, focus mainly on how and in what ways national and international responses fail to address the situation and, hence, further escalate it. Before engaging with this, however, a brief note that provides a glimpse about the underlying causes of the crisis is necessary here.

The underlying cause of the present disaster in Darfur is the failure of traditional systems for the allocation of land and water resources and the mediation of conflict.¹ This failure is aggravated by a combination of ecological changes and government manipulation. Over the years, the ability of local communities to cope with drought and famine dwindled over the last couple of decades, and the capacity of their traditional systems of conflict mediation over rapidly diminishing resources became overwhelmed. It is difficult to separate or rank these underlying and aggravating causes, as they tend to interact with and reinforce each other, sometimes linking to broader or very local factors. In all this, however, the role of the central government is central in aggravating the situation (Assal 2005, 2006). But the crisis in Darfur certainly has historical roots. Failure of traditional systems can be traced back to when British colonial administrators resurrected native administration in the Sudan, whereby so-called paramount tribal chiefs had jurisdiction over specific territory and its population, including the power to allocate land. This system undermined the fluidity and flexibility of traditional land tenure and informal conflict mediation systems.

¹ This paragraph and the following two ones are based on Assal (2005: 4-5).

After independence, national governments continued discredited colonial policies or imposed their own misguided and authoritarian models. As control over allocation of land changed, and with growing armament and the polarization of ethnic identities (Arabs versus Africans), traditional conflicts acquired drastically different dimensions and scale.

The image of the crisis in Darfur is familiar throughout post-colonial Africa, but probably the scale of the crisis is second to none in recent history due to protracted instability, endemic proclivity for destructive power struggles among politicians, and lethargic Darfuri political elite that has historically allied with the central government. The manner in which the central government reacted to the problem has indeed been one of the aggravating factors. Inaccurate characterization of the crisis, tampering with the complex ethnic makeup of Darfur, and the use of excessive force are the main features of Khartoum's reaction. This warrants the argument that the Darfur crisis also reflects the paradox of the post-colonial state in Africa: asserting the prerogatives of sovereignty without fulfilling its responsibilities towards its citizens (An-Na'im 2003).

Other regional factors have indeed contributed to scaling up the crisis. The Libyan-Chadian war during the 1980s resulted in making Darfur a depot of sophisticated weaponry that includes automatic rifles and submachine guns. Due to the absence of the government and the generalized state of insecurity, owning a gun became vital for survival. The result is the spread of arms all over the region. Apart from the suffering of civilians and the devastation of life in the region, the whole society is held in polarity: "Arabs" versus "Africans." The long-term implications of this polarization are difficult to pinpoint, but to be certain the damage inflicted on the social fabric of Darfur is serious. Such polarization is also likely to persist as long as war continues (De Waal 2005). The attempts undertaken so far to deal with the crisis did not match the gravity of the situation. The absence of good will, from both the government and those who are carrying arms, and the lack of knowledge and good will, from the part of the international community, thwart attempts to conclude a just and peaceful solution to the crisis. To be certain, however, the different Sudanese governments have historically been adopting similar policies when dealing with problems in peripheral regions. Therefore, before dealing with the response of the incumbent government, a brief historical overview is necessary here.

The national response I: it is about history repeating itself

The strange way the government in Khartoum reacted to and dealt with the crisis in Darfur is not something new. In fact, there were many historical precedents that are akin to the current national response to the crisis in Darfur. It thus becomes imperative to historicize the conflict, particularly the ways different government regimes dealt with problems in Darfur in the recent Sudanese history. To start with, it is important to note that throughout the history of Darfur, there has been a sort of cliental relationship between the dominant ruling groups and their subordinate followers. This existed even during the reign of the

Fur, where there has been a contradiction between the dominant position of the Fur and the client position of the Baggara to the south, the Zaghawa and Meidoub to the north; a contradiction which had marked the Fur Sultanate (Harir 1994: 154). Through its policy of pacification and other measures that followed the annexation of Darfur in 1916, the British colonial rule succeeded to remove this contradiction. However, the manipulation of Darfur by the centre the way it is happening today can intelligibly be traced back to the Turco-Egyptian rule in Darfur (1874-1888) and the Mahadist period (Al-Mubarak 1995). During the reign of these two regimes, the use of excessive force against foes and the policy of divide and rule represented the main markers of the centre's intervention in the affairs of the periphery; Darfur in this case.

Both the Turco-Egyptian rule in Darfur (1874-1888) and the Mahadist State (1883-1898) adopted similar policies when dealing with the different insurgent groups in Darfur. Until the Turco-Egyptian forces occupied it in 1874, the Kira, a Fur dynasty whose descendants claim to have an Arab origin, ruled Darfur. Historians show that the Fur rule goes back to 1640 when Suleiman Solong² managed to subject and rule over the different tribal groups in the region (O'Fahey 1980). The Kira dynasty ruled Darfur from 1640 to 1874, when the ³Turco-Egyptian troops, led by Al-Zubair Pasha (a famous Sudanese warlord and slave trader), defeated their Sultan, Ibrahim Qarad. Rudolf von Slatin, an Austrian national, was appointed by the Turco-Egyptian government to run Darfur. The office of Slatin was characterized by chaos and recurrent insurgencies and inter-tribal wars (Takana 1997), until he surrendered to the victorious Mahdist troops in 1888. Slatin spent most of his time in the region confronting the Fur and other Arab groups that often defied his rule. In dealing with the different insurgents, he used the policy of divide and rule; of supporting the different groups to fight each other.

The Mahdist rule in Darfur (1883-1899) was also a chaotic period. Many wars were fought between the different tribes and against the Mahdist state, too. In its attempts to pacify Darfur, the Mahdist state adopted many intrigues and waged war against the Zaghawa, the Fur, the Masalit, Rezeigat, Habbaniya, Meidoub; almost all tribes in the region, and forcibly conscripted members of these tribes to confront the threats of the Abyssinians in the east, the Anglo-Egyptian threat in the north, and the Ashraf (the Mahdi's kinsmen who refused to recognize the Khalifa's authority) in Omdurman- the national capital of the Mahdist state. What is taking place in Darfur at the present day bears resemblance to the chaos and overwhelming instability that prevailed during the Mahdist rule over the region.

The British colonial rule adopted a policy that went into a different track than that of its predecessors. The British policy was one of pacification and regularization of ethnic and tribal groups (Beck 1996). The basic concern of the

² Solong means "Arab" in the Fur language.

³ For more on the Mahadist policies on Darfur, see Al-Mubarak (1995) and Assal (2006: 8-10)

British in Darfur during the few years that followed the conquest in 1916 was security and the prevention of Mahadist revival. To that end, the British went for native administration. Through the issuance of ordinances, they regularized the status of tribal chiefs. Such chiefs were given a wide range of powers that included tax collection and judicial responsibilities. According to De Waal (2005: 12), “this was a means of setting the tribal leaders to police their subjects, to keep an eye on both millenarian preachers and discontented graduates. Along with these came the ‘Closed Districts Ordinance’ used in Darfur to keep an eye on wandering preachers and West African immigrants.” Moreover, the British also regularized boundaries through the formalization of tribal *dars* or *hakuras*. These measures certainly succeeded in curbing the rampant cross tribal feuds and provided stability in Darfur. Tribal leaders could solve disputes that fall within their jurisdiction and resort to the colonial office only in serious cases that they fail to address. But the colonial policies had negative long-term implications for the stability in Darfur, to the extent that all national regimes subsequent to the independence in 1956 followed some of the discredited colonial policies. One thing that policy makers take for granted is the role of native administration. Although things changed a lot, still tribal leaders are looked at through the same lens that the British used almost a century ago. One cannot help but argue that when the state fails to confront head on challenges of its own creation, it resorts to proxies. In fact, this seems to be the case in most postcolonial African states (Mamdani 1999). In the Darfurian context, one really wonders whether native administration can play any positive or constructive role the way it allegedly did previously. This argument is based on my belief that things in Darfur changed dramatically and, in fact; the dramatic unfolding of the crisis was in itself an indicator to the inability of native administration to avert it. Gone are days when native administrators could play both judicial and administrative roles. Perhaps it is time to look for a different modality. The following section deals with the response of the incumbent government to the present crisis.

National response II: 2003 and beyond

A dominant feature of the government’s response to the crisis in Darfur since 2003 and beyond has been the absence of a proper characterization of the conflict (Assal 2006). Building on a legacy of environmental degradation and armed robbery, the war in Darfur has been dubbed by the government as representing a violent competition between farmers and nomads and a culmination of crimes committed by armed gangs and robbers. This characterization continued for a long time before it was too obvious that it cannot be sustained anymore. The conspicuous media coverage (international media) of the conflict in Darfur resulted not only in the exposure of heinous crimes committed against civilians, but also contributed to building up a strong international opinion against what is taking place in the region. Demonstrations and campaigns of support have been organized in Europe and the US. Against this conspicuous international media coverage, the national media’s behavior is, to say the least, bizarre. While appalling pictures of burnt and destroyed villages occupied pages of foreign press and TV screens, there is hardly anything about these images in local media outlets. But perhaps one should be cautious in

criticizing local media and the press. The government has a strong control on local newspapers, radio and TV. Censorship of the media crippled any objective engagement with the Darfur crisis. Even relatively independent newspapers could not touch the issue in a meaningful manner. Their coverage thus resonated with the official position. In 2003, just after the SLA attacked El-Fashir, the author of this article sent a commentary on the incident to the independent *Khartoum Monitor*. The response of the editor was: “we are instructed not to talk about or publish any article relating to Darfur.”⁴

The absence of a proper characterization of the conflict led to interventions that further escalated the situation in Darfur. The government was not ready to listen to some wise voices that had a different view about the situation. The then governor of Northern Darfur, General Ibrahim Suliman, was among a few members of the ruling party who advised the government to adopt a more flexible and open political approach to the problem. As early as 2002, he led a delegation that met with the rebels in Jebel Marra and listened to their demands. Nonetheless, the security framework adopted by the government thwarted his efforts and, following the attack on El-Fashir in March 2003, Ibrahim Suliman was sacked. What followed the attack on El-Fashir was a military campaign that escalated the situation and with the appearance of the *janjaweed* things got out of hand. Both the government and the armed groups were determined to defeat each other militarily. But both failed and the only thing they achieved was the destruction of the social fabric and the creation of one of the most horrendous humanitarian crisis in the continent.

A third characterization, which is a corollary of the above two ones, is a lack of interest from the part of the government to negotiate a peaceful settlement to the crisis. This lack of interest is in fact predicated on a wrong characterization and an arrogant outlook that have for long shaped the response of Khartoum to problems in peripheral regions (El-Battahani 2004). Characterizing the conflict as ‘tribal’ is one thing that underlies lack of government interest in addressing the conflict in scrupulous manner. What is more, labeling the conflict as ‘tribal’ constituted the ground for an ugly polarization of the entire society in Darfur into ‘Arabs’ and ‘Africans.’ Contrary to the wide belief that the polarization of the society into Arab and African blocs was the creation of biased and screwed international media, I would argue that international media just appropriated terms that were already in use; terms which the government helped to create through its alliances with and support to certain tribal groups in Darfur long before the present crisis (Harir 1994).

It is in the context of this polarization that the term *janjaweed* appeared and became a defining feature of the crisis. *Janjaweed* is a very mysterious group, which is yet to be thoroughly studied and understood. Easy explanations characterize members of this group as veiled Arab militia men armed with AK47s, mounting horses, killing innocent civilians, burning villages, looting, and

⁴ Personal communication with the Editor of *Khartoum Monitor Daily*, April 2003.

raping women.⁵ Certainly some elements of this description are correct. What remains unclear, however, is whether all the janjaweed are Arabs or not. Another thing that is unclear is the relationship between Khartoum and the janjaweed. Khartoum has consistently denied that it arms the janjaweed, and describes them as ‘undisciplined groups.’ It is, however, extremely difficult to give Khartoum the benefit of the doubt: even if we accept its denial, one cannot help but argue that it condoned the actions of the janjaweed. Since the janjaweed are enemies of the armed groups (the SLA and JEM), they must be friends of Khartoum. This being said, it must be stressed that the regional dimension of the crisis in Darfur must not be underestimated. Some groups of the janjaweed are cross-border tribes that traverse the boundaries between Sudan, Chad, and the Central Africa Republic.

The lack of humane action in the national context is not something that is uniquely a governmental trend. Part of the national inaction relates to the behavior of the society at large, represented by trade unions and civil society organizations. The miseries of people in Darfur did not catch the attention of ordinary Sudanese people, particularly in Khartoum, the national capital. Through demonstrations, Khartoum is famous for its response to problems in the Middle East and the Muslim world at large, but such response was absent in the case of Darfur. To be certain, repressive environment is key element here and like the case with the press, the government would repress any group that seeks to publicly denounce the atrocities in Darfur. Nonetheless, even within the dim margin of freedom that exists, civil society organizations failed to show a noticeable concern over Darfur. It is only when the process of negotiation began that some civil society organizations started to talk about the importance of engaging with the crisis. Their absence from the scene contributed to the weaknesses of the Abuja agreement.

The Abuja agreement (DPA) brokered in May 2006 again reflected lack of interest from the part of the government to address the underlying causes of the crisis. When negotiations dragged for a long time, the international community lacked patience and was therefore pushing for any deal that would stop the war in Darfur. Instead of solving the problem, the agreement created other serious problems chief of which is the rift between the different armed groups. It was also very frustrating to the displaced and refugee persons whose cause was not properly addressed by the agreement. The formation of the National Redemption Front (*jabhat alkhals alwatani*) is in fact one consequence of the agreement. Two key features of the Abuja Peace Agreement could be identified. First, as just mentioned, the agreement led to rifts within SLM. While Minni Minnawi signed

⁵ The “African” and “Arab” divide in Darfur is certainly one complicating factor in the crisis. Despite the striking focus on these labels, they are basically political constructions. The UN Commission on Darfur (2004) found that “many Arabs in Darfur are opposed to the Janjaweed, and some Arabs are fighting with the rebels, such as certain Arab commanders and their men from the Messeriya and Rezeigat tribes. At the same time, many non-Arabs are supporting the government and serving in its army.” Arabs and non-Arabs can hardly be distinguished in their outward physical appearance. The UN Commission concludes: “apparently, the sedentary and nomadic character of the groups constitutes one of the main distinctions between them.”

(under the pressure of the mediators), Abdelwahid Nour refused. The Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) also refused to sign. In effect, the agreement was born weak. Second, as bad and weak as it was, the agreement exposed the hypocrisy and lack of will of the government in Khartoum. More than two years since the agreement was signed, the implementation is lethally slow. This led to frustration among Minnawi's group and its allies. Minnawi, who is currently Senior Assistant to the President, is seen by the Darfurians as "a lame duck."

The way the government reacted to and engaged with the crisis in Darfur appears to be one in which the state monopolized coercive power to inflict suffering on civilians. It is tempting thus to describe the Sudanese state as strong, in so far as it was able to use force in its response to the crisis, and in so far as the government has been trying in vain to convince the international community that it is able to deal with the crisis in Darfur. Yet, there are certain features that stand against the image of a strong state. These include, first, the central government in Khartoum lost effective control over vast territories in Darfur. Rebel movements were able, over a short period of time, to control vast areas in the countryside. Second, violence has been rampant- all parties to the conflict were engaged in this violence. Third, the level of human suffering in Darfur has been appalling. Whether these features constitute the ground for labeling Sudan as a failed state or not is debatable. But certainly they present too many conundrums. Such conundrums make it extremely difficult for the international community to engage in a meaningful and constructive ways in its efforts to address the crisis. But this is not to say that the international community is conundrums-free. In the following I shall discuss the ways in which the international community engages with the crisis in Darfur.

The response of the international community

Whatever response the international community has had on Darfur, it was basically the result of the appalling images brought by media coverage. The images coming out of Darfur put the region on the agenda of the world. But almost two years after the escalation of the problem into full war, there was no concrete response. With the international community unwilling to act, the AU came forward to try to stop the violence in its own region. After helping to negotiate the April 2004 ceasefire between the armed movements and the government, the AU deployed several hundred unarmed observers to monitor it. When the fighting continued, the AU deployed armed peacekeepers to protect the monitors and then expanded the numbers to be sent in and the mandate itself so that its police and troops could increase security for IDP camps and IDP returns, and protects civilians under imminent threat. The first African troops were represented by the Rwandan contingency that arrived in August 2004, followed in the subsequent months by Nigerian and other African troops (Cohen 2005). But the African presence in Darfur was not robust, and the presence of those troops did not stop the atrocities as the war became more ferocious.

Being on the world agenda has not yet led to meaningful steps to end the fighting or even adequately to address the needs of those uprooted. So what is it that has

impeded the international response? This question can be answered at two levels; legal and practical. First, the lack of a meaningful engagement is predicated on the lack, or thereof, of a proper characterization. Since its onset, two verdicts were delivered on Darfur, the first from the US, the second from the UN. According to Mamdani (2007), “the American verdict was unambiguous: Darfur was the site of an ongoing genocide.” In contrast to the US position, the UN was ambiguous. In its report of 25 January 2005 on Darfur, the UN Commission on Darfur concluded: “the government of the Sudan has not pursued a policy of genocide...directly or through the militias under its control” (UN 2005: 4). Nonetheless, the UN report states that the government’s violence was deliberately and indiscriminately directed against civilians. These contradictory verdicts have certainly affected the way the crisis is dealt with at the international level. It is as though genocide must happen before the international community could intervene. The lesson of the Rwandan case was not yet learned.

Second, at the practical level, “one reason the international community finds the Darfur problem difficult to address is that state reliance on excessive force against ethnic or racial groups seeking greater autonomy is not unique to Sudan” (Cohen 2005: 7). Another reason for the lack of strong international response is the absence of tools and structures available to the international community to address internal crises. For these reasons, the international community is faced with formidable challenges. This is because most of the instruments available for the international community to intervene in crisis situations depend on the existence of an effective state. In the case of Darfur, the state has no effective or meaningful presence since the armed movements control vast areas in region. Under such circumstances the international community does not really know who should be put under pressure: the government or the rebel movements. So far the pressure has been on the government, with predictably little outcomes. In situations where security is deteriorating, any meaningful presence of the international community would have to be backed by force. But the use of force cannot be a panacea, and may in itself complicate the situation.

The continuation of atrocities and human suffering led the AU and the international community to pressure for a negotiated settlement of the crisis. After long months of negotiations between the government and the armed movements, a peace deal was brokered in Abuja in May 2006. To many people, the Darfur Peace Agreement (DPA) reflected the need of the international community to end of misery in Darfur, rather than to address the underlying causes of the crisis. This is reflected in the following two observations: first, the UN, US, UK and other key players were pushing too hard to reach a deal through putting pressure on both the government and the armed movements; second, the pressure, although succeeded in getting the agreement, led to the split of the movements and the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) and a faction of the Sudan Liberation Army (SLA) to reject the deal. Efforts to convince the dissenting voices failed so far. But the most serious implication of the DPA is that it created a rift between people in Darfur: some look at it as a bad deal that did not really address their concerns, while others cautiously welcome it. Based on

the increase of violence in the immediate aftermath of the agreement, one can argue that the DPA did not win the heart and support of local communities in Darfur.

The escalation of violence in Darfur prompted the UN to start consultations to deploy troops in Darfur, to help enforce the agreement, and mandate these troops to take all necessary measures to protect UN personnel and disarm illegally armed groups. The government of Sudan completely rejected any role for the UN in Darfur. Efforts to convince the government to let in UN troops failed and until the UN resolution 1706 was passed on August 31st 2006, there was no sign that the government will rescind its decision. The resolution states in its first article: “the UN Security Council invites the *consent* of the government of national unity for the deployment of UN troops in Darfur.”

The UN Security Council’s Resolution 1706 was not unanimous, and it lacked the appropriate mechanism to enforce it. The weaknesses of the resolution were the result of a number of reasons: first, the word ‘consent’ is too ambiguous to be specific and it is not clear from the resolution whether this consent is necessary or not. Second, in light of the rejection of the Sudan government of the resolution 1706, it is doubtful whether member states would pledge troops knowing that these troops will be in great danger. Third, if the UN would ignore the consent of the Sudan government and send in troops, such troops will be fighting for a totally different cause. This will increase human suffering in Darfur. Fourth, the AU and those who brokered the DPA pledged to impose sanctions on those who refuse to sign, but nothing of that sort is happening. In fact, those who declined to sign are currently active in war in Darfur. The credibility of the international community is indeed at risk, and actually there are too many examples that devalue UN military engagement.

Precisely one year after resolution 1706, the UN Security Council passed resolution 1769 on July 31st 2007. Unlike its predecessor, the Security Council unanimously adopted resolution 1769 and the government in Khartoum accepted it. The resolution authorized the deployment of a 26,000-strong joint United Nations-African Union force, “in an attempt to quell the violence in Sudan’s western Darfur region, where fighting between pro-Government militias and rebel guerrillas has killed more than 250,000 people since 2003.” The UN “hybrid force” (a combination of UN forces and African Unions forces already in Darfur, know as UNAMID, “will have up to 19,555 military personnel, including 360 military observers and liaison officers, a civilian component including up to 3,772 international police and 19 special police units with up to 2,660 officers.” One of the important provisions in the resolution states that “the Council, acting under Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter, authorized UNAMID to take the necessary action to support implementation of the Darfur Peace Agreement, as well as to protect its personnel and civilians “without prejudice to the responsibility of the Government of Sudan”.

Although robust and unanimous, resolution 1769 has some problems. First, the resolution states that UNAMID is authorized to take the necessary action to support the implementation of Darfur Peace Agreement. To my mind, this is yet another mistake the international community will commit. First, the DPA did not win the hearts of people in Darfur and led to rifts between and among the armed groups. Since many factions were not signatories to the DPA, one wonders how it can be implemented. Furthermore, the UN, in 2005, threatened to take actions against anyone who impedes the implementation of the DPA, but nothing of that sort happened thus far. The UN will have to seek a unity of purpose among the different rebel factions before talking about supporting the implementation of the DPA. The Arusha meeting of August 2007 was certainly one step for the unification of the different armed groups, but more needs to be done before the upcoming peace talks (October 27, 2007) in Libya.

Second, a long time will pass before the hybrid forces could be on the ground in Darfur. Up to now, there was no agreement about the headquarters of UNAMID: will it be in El-Fashir or Nyala? Importantly, there are also some problems related to coordination between the new arriving forces and the AU troops that are already stationed in Darfur. Command structures and logistical issues are also among the questions that will likely delay the actual deployment of the forces.⁶

Third, while Sudan accepted the hybrid forces in principle, the government still insists that it will only accept troops from African countries. Interestingly, the AU leadership is backing the Sudanese position. These cracks are part of the overall lack of clarity in the position of the international community with regard to the crisis in Darfur. Apart from this, UNAMID might get sucked into the circles of violence in Darfur, and instead of being a peace keeping mission it might come under attacks and ends up trying to protect its own personnel.

Fourth, and finally, in dealing with the government of Sudan, the international community is holding the stick from the middle. On the one hand, the Sudan government is seen as “rouge” regime that supports terrorism and violates human rights of its own citizens. On the other, the Sudan government is an incumbent government with which the international community must do business! Adopting these two contradictory positions is like shooting in the feet. Additionally, such ambiguity allows the government to manipulate international politics and buy time for its tactics, not only with regard to the crisis in Darfur, but also with regard to the question of consolidating the CPA and democratic transformation.

The armed groups: a revolutionary force turned to its anti-thesis?!

Part of the responsibility for the escalation of the crisis and stalemate in the peace process rests with the different armed groups in Darfur. This is for a number of

⁶ Personal communication with the Head of Civilian Protection Unit, UNAMIS, Khartoum, May 2007.

reasons that will shortly be discussed. Here, however, it is necessary to note that the armed struggle in Darfur is linked to two main armed groups: The Sudan Liberation Army/Movement (SLA/M) and the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM). In the beginning, the rank and file and leadership in both movements were Zaghawa and Fur, but later their membership expanded to include people from other tribes; including the so-called Arabs. The political manifesto of both movements addresses injustices, marginalisation and inequity in the sharing of wealth and power in the Sudan. Their project was thus a national one. But instead of confronting the central government, these two movements were trapped in fighting the *janjaweed*, no less marginalized, who are considered government allies. The revolutionary strength of these two movements is therefore turned into its anti-thesis: a destructive force that is contributing to the creation of humanitarian crisis in the region. This trap detracted from the main issue, which is the fight for equality and justice.

Subsequent to the N'djamena ceasefire agreement in 2004, cracks appeared within the armed movements. The first splinter group was the so-called National Movement for Development and Reform (NMDR), which was an offshoot of JEM. But the main crack happened during the Haskanita Convention in 2004, in which Minni Minnawi was elected as SLA leader, thus effectively ousting Abdelwahid Nour. SLA suffered further cracks in the aftermath of the Darfur Peace Agreement, which was signed only by Minnawi's faction. Subsequently, both factions (Minnawi's and Nour) suffered splintering. It is difficult to know exactly how many factions exist at the present time. Suffice it to note that JEM also suffered the same. Its leader, Khalil Ibrahim, has been accused of nepotism, despotism, and the propagation of kinship clientele within the movement.

It is tempting to put the blame on the government in Khartoum, which has long been playing a game of "divide and rule." But then it is also true that many leaders of these different factions and splinter groups do not really know what they want or what they stand for. They are unclear about their mission, and they lack a vision. If all these different factions are fighting for the cause of Darfur, why is it so difficult for them to forge a unity of purpose? Why is it so difficult to unify their agenda and put these agenda forward in the negotiating table? Factionalism among the armed groups is certainly one contributing factor in the increasing human suffering in the region. At the time of writing this paper, only one week remains before peace talks on Darfur start in Sirite, Libya. Yet, there is a remote possibility that the different factions will unify their position or go the talks with one delegation.

Concluding remarks

Government cynicism, international confusion (and lack of will too), and complex local level dynamics contributed to the escalation of the crisis in Darfur. The same factors are also effectively present when peaceful settlements initiatives are attempted. While civil society organizations, human rights activists, and columnists worldwide did their utmost to bring the attention of the world to what is happening in Darfur, it is unfortunate that much of the effort is

counterproductive. This is because the Darfur crisis; a complex political crisis, is being reduced to “a morality tale,” to use Mamadani’s (2007) phrase, unfolding in a world populated by villains and victims. The villains are so evil and the victims are so helpless that the only possibility is a rescue mission, preferably in the form of a military intervention. This view amounts to a dangerous reductionism. Darfur has a long history of conflict; of competition between the different constituent forces. Such long and complex history must not be forgotten while attempting to deal with the crisis.

The international community, represented by the UN, has been repeating mistakes when dealing with the crisis in Darfur. The first mistake was done when too much pressure was put on Minnawi to sign the DPA. When that happened, the UN went public and declared that it will punish anybody who stands against the implementation of the agreement. But nothing of that sort happened, even though too many groups stood against the DPA since day one. The second mistake committed in resolution 1769, which stated in its opening that the hybrid force, UNAMID, will have the power to take all necessary measures to ensure the implementation of the DPA. This means that no peace will be achieved soon in Darfur. It appears that deploying the hybrid forces is the last chance for the international community to bring peace to Darfur. The question that needs to be asked is: do we have reasons to believe that UNAMID will be successful?

The incumbent government in Sudan is still playing its tactical games and cynicism. The government is not open to deal sincerely with the root causes of the crisis. Questions of equitable distribution of political power and economic resources, and just development are some of the issues that the government is not really willing to discuss. The stalemate in the already standing three peace agreements (the CPA, DPA, and ESPA) indicates that the government – the National Congress Party- is not serious about implementing agreements it signs. It also indicates that the forthcoming peace talks on Darfur in Libya might just be another instance of public relations diplomacy. A key element in forcing the government to be serious is the unification of the armed groups in Darfur. Perhaps this is where the international community should focus its efforts.

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