

**Self-determination is Not the Culprit: The Password to Unity is  
Democratic Transformation**

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### **Prelude**

I wish start by thanking the conference organizers for granting me this opportunity to address this distinguished gathering. The theme chosen for deliberations, challenges and options for Sudan after 50 years of independence, is not only pertinent, it is also timely at this critical juncture in the country's historical evolution. Unity is and has always remained during this entire period both a cherished objective for the Sudanese masses, particularly in the north, and a paramount and overarching challenge that may result in detrimental consequences for their future, if not realized. One could not, however, talk about unity of the Sudan without paying tribute to the late Dr. John Garang de Mabior, the great Sudanese leader whose zeal, enthusiasm and genuine efforts at maintaining the unity of the country were, and are noted, even by non-Sudanese observers, as exceptional. Though he did not live long enough to see the outcome of his 22 years of struggle, the late Garang fought for decades to achieve a just peace that could furnish the ground for uniting the Sudanese on the basis of equality and human dignity for all. The essence of his vision was equitable management of diversity and respect for the identities and cultures of all national groups. Although Sudan was his base and the focus of his vision, his horizon extended far beyond and embraced the sub-region and the whole continent of Africa. Indeed, the ideals he stood for in the Sudanese and the African contexts could apply globally to countries and regions torn apart by racial, ethnic, religious and cultural diversity and disparity.

In this presentation I intend to share with you some thoughts underpinned with two-fold objective of 1) clearing the misunderstanding and confusion that have surrounded the political discourse and intellectual debate on the question of unity, and 2)

clarifying the role (s) that the various Sudanese political forces need to play to sustain this unity. Though the Northern political forces assume the lion's share of this responsibility, a sizeable share lies on the shoulders of the SPLM, which claims to be a national political actor that has been espousing and promoting "unity on new bases" for nearly a quarter of a century now. My thesis is that: the threat to unity does not stem from embracing the right of self-determination, as is commonly believed by many. Rather, unity, and thus any danger to it, is an outcome of, and inherent in the unfolding process of building the Sudanese state, which evolved in the context of two forms of struggle in the process of national liberation and nation building. The first phase was characterized by the struggle against external domination and colonial rule. Post-independence marked the second era, which witnessed an ensuing internal struggle between the different social and political forces over the tasks of nation building: a struggle that is still raging on. It is the myopic and narrow-minded vision of the political forces that led the struggle for independence, especially those who inherited, and wielded power in the post-colonial era, and their failure to build an "inclusive" Sudanese state, that has placed in jeopardy the unity of the country.

A common misperception in the ensuing political and intellectual debate over the question of unity, however, is that the right of self-determination is seen, in emotional terms, to represent the underlying threat to this unity. Fears and concerns regarding the outcome of the exercise of the right of self-determination are, of course, legitimate. However, such understanding or rather misunderstanding, is perplexing and makes one wonder as whether its proponents seriously or really mean what they are saying! A couple of pertinent issues must be underlined to clear this misconception.

**First**, self-determination is a fundamental political and democratic right for all the peoples of the Sudan. Thus, The IGAD Declaration of Principles in 1994 endorsed that "extensive rights of self-determination on the basis of federation, autonomy, etc, to the various peoples of the Sudan must be affirmed". The rest of the Sudanese political forces in the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) confirmed the same right in the Asmara Declaration in 1995 to all the peoples of the Sudan. This, in a very deep sense, means that

the Sudanese people themselves must achieve the unity of the country, which is synonymous with the building of the Sudanese nation-state, through self-determination. On the other hand, the right of self-determination became a demand for southern Sudanese only in the early 1990s in response to objective political conditions both in Khartoum and the south as a tool or a mechanism for achieving voluntary unity in an adverse environment. This is simply why it was invoked 9 years following the inception of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM).

**Second**, and most importantly, what should be of utmost and overriding concern is not the right of self-determination, but rather the definition of, and agreement on “what is this unity we are talking about” and “what are its constituent parts and parameters”? Thus, though Sudan was ushered into independence formally, and “ostensibly” united in 1956, the southern Sudanese vehemently contested the constitutional bases of this unity in 1955 before even the country's independence was consummated. The call from the south for regional self-autonomy went unheeded by northern political leaders, resulting in a deep rift between the north and the south that ignited a bloody civil war, which continued for 17 years in its first phase only. At the time, the term “self-determination” was unheard of, except in the context of Sudan's relationship with the colonial powers at large.

Indeed, the Sudanese “nationalist” movement was largely a “northern” phenomenon! By the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the national struggle against British colonial rule took various forms, beginning with tribal-based revolts that engulfed various parts of the country. The struggle saw the development of armed political movements with the emergence of the White Flag League in 1924. The suppression of the mutiny by the colonial powers succeeded in temporarily crippling the nationalist movement. Nationalism, however, re-emerged in the 1930s and was a product of the British colonial policies. The British colonial political economy was based on a semi-articulated pattern of colonial capitalism with pre-capitalist modes and forms of production that, to a large extent, left little room for fundamental changes in the structures of Sudanese society. Colonial capitalism integrated both urban and rural sectors into wider national and international political-economic structures. It was within these structures that the

leadership of the “nationalist” movement was, therefore, constituted as an alliance between the middle-class intelligentsia, the rural aristocracy and the urban-based “Jallaba” merchants.

On the other hand, the hostility of the people of South Sudan to colonial rule, coupled with other cultural and religious differences with the North, forced the colonial authorities to adopt different policies for the administration of the South. This was exacerbated by the rebellion in 1924 by the White Flag League when the South, the Nuba Mountains and the Ingessina Hills were sealed off from the rest of Sudan under the Closed Districts Ordinance, and a separate policy for the southern provinces was formulated to enforce the complete and separate development of the two parts of the then Anglo-Egyptian Sudan. From that time until the reversal of the policy in 1947, South and North Sudan were separate entities with their own formal travel and consular arrangements. The most critical factor overlooked by the northern “nationalist” leaders in the process of national formation was the colonial concentration of economic, political and administrative development in the north at the expense of the south, thereby creating socio-economic and political disparities between the center and the marginalized regions of the country, particularly the south. This gap, which over the years widened in every respect, was heightened by the attitude of the Northern political elite who excluded the South from the political process vis-à-vis the independence struggle. Indeed, the civil secretary between 1938 and 1945, Douglas Newbold, realized that the Northern elite were in a position to dominate the process of de-colonization and to rule a post-colonial Sudan. Referring to the monopoly of the riverain groups, Newbold asserted that the immediate political future of the country obviously rested in their combined hands. Later on many among the non-Northern elite argued that the early movement, which claimed for itself the title of the “Sudanese nationalist movement”, had no grounds to claim that name.

Equally, it is imperative to note that the colonial policy of unequal development and the political hegemony of the Northern riverain elite caused much disgruntlement among the regional elites in other less developed parts of Sudan. Anticipating that an alliance of traditional leaders and educated elite of the north would replace the British,

thus perpetuating the colonial structures, some members of the elite in western Sudan therefore formed their own al-Kutla as-Sawda (the Black Bloc) organization in 1938. As with many other anti-colonialist movements in Africa, the Black Bloc began as a regional social movement. It expanded very rapidly, attracting people from the Nuba and the Fur, as well as West Africans and former slaves. Furthermore, regionally based political organizations and parties also emerged in the 1960s. Ethno-regional parties are not exclusively confined to 'ethnic' or 'regional' membership, but the general characteristics defining these parties include that they were formed in response to regional grievances, their policy platform is always anti-the Khartoum government, and they were transformed from peaceful movements to armed rebel groups fighting against the central government. This was exactly what happened in Eastern Sudan and Darfur after decades of political and cultural exclusion and economic marginalization in a bid to restructure power in the center, as well as power relations between the center and the peripheries.

What was strongly needed to stop the civil war and restore the country's unity, however, was an inclusive constitutional and governance framework that would guarantee effective participation of the marginalized groups in political power, as well as an equitable share in national wealth. Ironically, it was the authoritarian military May regime (1969-1985), building on the recommendations of the Roundtable Conference organized in 1965 during the 2<sup>nd</sup> Democratic Republic (1964-69), which succeeded in introducing a considerable measure of power restructuring, thus putting an end to 17 years of bitter fighting. Backed by the popular support of the "modern forces" and the trade union movement, the military regime signed the Addis Ababa Accord in February 1972, which granted autonomous self-rule, but within a united Sudan, to the South as one region with various defined powers, in addition to representation of southerners in the national government, including the position of a vice-president. According to the Agreement, all revenues from resources and exports in the south should accrue to the regional government.

The agreement of the May government with the Southern Sudan Liberation Movement represented the second major constitutional restructuring after independence. Thus, willingly surrendering the demand for separation, southerners were content to live

in a united Sudan as long they enjoyed regional autonomy, while participating in the power structure of the center. As such a measure of political stability engulfed the country in the wake of the conclusion of the Peace Accord. This has, however, proved to be short-lived as the power alliances shifted following the National Reconciliation and the ascendance of the “Islamists” in the power structures of the authoritarian regime, who regarded the Agreement as a form of surrender to southerners. The nascent democratic practices in the south (an elected Southern Regional Assembly and High Executive Council) and relative political freedoms were a source of sabotage and disruption for the northern political establishment.

Fearful of the South’s growing political power, Nimeiri used all manner of machinations and political intrigue to dismantle and abrogate the Addis Abba Peace Accord. Thus, Presidential Decree No.1 of June 1983 divided the Southern region into the three old provinces. This was followed in September by the proclamation of the Shari’a as the basis of the Sudanese legal system. These drastic decisions came against a backdrop of many contentious issues and contradictions, which pitted the South directly against Nimeiri’s regime. These included: the issue of the Jonglei canal (1974); the provincial border disputes (1980) in which Nimeiri attempted to redraw the provincial boundaries, carving off oil-rich areas in Bentiu (including building a pipeline that would directly carry oil from Bentiu in the south to Port Sudan) and the fertile agricultural lands of northern Upper Nile, with the intention of annexing them to the North; and the unprovoked and continuous interference by Nimeiri in the political and democratic process in the South, demonstrated by the unconstitutional suspension of the Southern Regional Assembly. The failure of the government in Juba to respond appropriately to Nimeiri’s unilateral decisions resulted in sporadic armed uprisings between the end of the 1970s and early 1980s. These developments culminated in the formation of the Sudan People’s Liberation Army and Movement (SPLA/M) in May 1983, which heralded the outbreak of the second civil war that lasted for another 22 years.

## **A Genuine Call for Unity from the South:**

### **New Sudan vs. Old Sudan**

The late Dr. Garang's preoccupation with the Sudanese governance crisis, the civil war in the South and his genuine search for achieving a lasting and just peace, were behind the concept of the New Sudan. The failure of the Addis Ababa Agreement, to which the late Dr. John was a staunch opponent, in delivering promised peace and prosperity to Southern Sudan, prompted him to revisit the approach and the way the Sudanese conflict has been perceived. Why would Sudanese people keep fighting and killing each other if the contested issues were not so grave? It dawned on him that marginalization in all its forms, discrimination, injustice and subordination, constitute the root causes of the conflict that cannot be addressed in a piecemeal fashion through dishing out handouts and concessions to the disgruntled and rebellious groups whenever a conflict erupted in a particular region. Sudanese have problems everywhere in the west, in the east, in the center, in the far north. It is an attempt at marginalization to define the problem as the "southern problem". Garang's thinking, thus, goaded him to redefine the problem to be the "problem of the Sudan" and not the "problem of the South", as conventionally advocated by the successive ruling regimes in Khartoum. The fish rots from the head and not from the tail! It is the Sudanese state, epitomized by the power structure in the Center, which needs to be radically restructured in order to accommodate the Sudan's manifold diversity and attend to all forms of exclusion and marginalization of its people.

Thus, consistent with the conceptualization of the Sudanese debacle as the "problem of the Sudan" rather than the "problem of the South", the solution is envisioned to be in the transformation of the whole Sudan after diligent and deep analysis of the Old Sudan. The attempts by various Khartoum-based regimes since 1956 to build a monolithic state, premised on two components only with the exclusion of other parameters of the Sudanese diversity constitutes the fundamental problem of the Sudan and defines the Sudanese conflict. The Sudanese state hitherto has excluded the vast majority of the Sudanese people from governance and therefore their

marginalization in the political, economic and social fields. This provoked resistance by the excluded. There have been wars and there continue to be wars in the Sudan, later vindicated by outbreak of war and armed conflicts in Darfur and Eastern Sudan. This is simply because the majority of the Sudanese are not stakeholders in their own governance.

The solution to this fundamental problem is to build an all-inclusive Sudanese state, a Citizenship state. This denotes a new political Sudanese dispensation in which all Sudanese are equal stakeholders irrespective of their religion, irrespective of their race, ethnic origin, tribe or gender. The vision of the New Sudan, thus, is essentially a national framework, a socio-economic and political commonality, anchored in and accommodative of the country's multiple diversity. It is a framework for reshaping all Sudan, moulding democracy, equality, freedom and progress, all essential ingredients for stability and genuine democracy. This is precisely what sets it apart from Old Sudan being exclusively based on only two parameters of the Sudanese historical and contemporary diversity. The essence of the vision is equitable management of diversity and respect for the identities and cultures of all "national" groups.

### **Keeping the Country United: The Role of Political Forces**

It is true that the SPLM remains to be the lead promoter and politically organized actor and vehicle that entrusted itself with the role of turning the New Sudan vision into reality at a particular historical moment. The vision is essentially a conceptual framework and is not an SPLM doctrine or ideology. It should not, therefore, be confused with Movement's organizational structure, strategies and tactics or with the accompanying political processes towards its realization, albeit all these are legitimate issues for debate, dialogue and critical appraisal. As such, the task of building a Sudanese citizenship-based state, a viable united Sudan, is a national project that cannot be solely accomplished by the SPLM on its own. This is why the late Garang, the leader of the Movement, was keen from the beginning to extend his hands to political and social forces in the North and was instrumental in bringing them together, except for the Democratic Unionist party (DUP)

and the National Islamic Front (NIF), in Koka Dam, Ethiopia, as early as March 1985. Indeed, the Koka Dam meeting's agenda was drawn from, and inspired by the New Sudan vision, which comprised: a) The nationalities question, b) the religious question, c) basic human rights, d) the system of rule, e) development and uneven-development f) natural resources, g) the regular forces and security arrangements, h) the cultural question, education, and the mass media, and I) foreign policy.

Rejecting all forms of dictatorships and absolutely committed to the democratic option, all these forces concurred that “it is necessary to create a New Sudan in which the Sudanese individual enjoys absolute freedom from the shackles of injustice, ignorance and disease in addition to enjoying the benefits of real democratic life; a New Sudan that would be free from racism, tribalism, sectarianism and all causes of discrimination and disparity”. It was, thus, agreed that the process leading to formation of a New Sudan should begin by the convening of a National Constitutional Conference (NCC), an event that was eventually aborted by the military coup of the NIF in June 1989. It is important to note that the Umma party later in February 1989 endorsed the idea of the NCC, which was scheduled to be held on 19 September 1989.

The NIF, therefore, was the only political force that abstained from any dialogue with the SPLM until it assumed power following the coup of 30 June 1989. This development was a turning point in the historical evolution of the Old Sudan, which denoted a split of the Old Sudan into two: what may be called the Old Sudan “proper”, and the NIF Sudan. Therefore, as correctly diagnosed by late Garang, following the NIF coup in 1989 “three Sudan(s) existed concurrently and simultaneously: the Old Sudan “proper”, which conceptually refers to the Sudan of 1956 until 1989, and continuing in that form. Then, the mutation within the Old Sudan in the form of the NIF, which can be described as a culmination of what had been happening since 1956, a form of chauvinism, both ethnic, and religious, inevitably leading to a form of fascism. The NIF represents that form of fascism in the country, which has developed as a result of what has been happening since 1956. This is in addition to the New Sudan, represented by all forms of resistance against the Old Sudan, including popular uprisings and armed struggle”.

Informed by this deep analysis and building on its earlier political relationships, the SPLM was instrumental in building alliances with all the political and social forces (both “traditional” and “modern”), under the umbrella of the NDA for moving forward the process of national formation. The SPLM was keen on establishing links and effective relations with all the forces in the north dubbed “modern”, “progressive”, or “democratic”. One option, among others, proposed by the Movement was to work in the context of the NDA as a broad-based and open alliance, which provides a space for all the forces of the New Sudan to propel it in the direction of setting-up the New Sudan. This was deemed important, as there was a predisposition among some sections of these forces for forming a strategic coalition with the SPLM to the exclusion of the “traditional” forces. This is a perilous approach. These forces may be discredited in the eyes of some people in the north but they are certainly not defunct, they have social bases in the country. In the words of late Dr. John “it was not clear to us then, as it is not clear to us now, whether the “traditional” forces themselves cannot change in their own interest. They are doing it in South Africa. The traditional forces of de Klerk, and others, changed to protect their interests and to protect the disintegration of South Africa. Thus, if the choice were between the disintegration of the Sudan and movement within the “traditional” forces, why would they not move in their own self-interest?”. On the other hand, the rural forces and the SPLM do not know much about the “modern” forces except through their subjective definition of themselves as “democrats” and “progressives”, which strips the proposed coalition of its objective prerequisites and realistic conditions. More importantly, with the rise of the rural and “nationality” forces (now in Darfur and the East) in the political arena, the issue of political alliances has become exceedingly complex and should not be perceived in a rigid and static manner. It should rather be seen as a process of incessant mutation and transformation.

The SPLM continued to play a leading role in the consolidation of the NDA, and constituted the Alliance’s largest and strongest military force. Since its inception, the NDA was faced with two problems if it were to realize its objectives. The first challenge was to articulate a political program embedded in, and guided by the grand objective of building the Sudanese democratic and inclusive state. The second task was to consolidate

itself into an organic entity capable of creating a mechanism(s) for the overthrow of the NIF regime.

First, after daunting deliberations between the allies in the NDA, a breakthrough was made on both fronts in Asmara. Thus, the 1995 conference on fundamental issues articulated a comprehensive program and reached understanding on the most contentious issues of the state and religion, self-determination and system of rule. Interim constitutional arrangements governing the transition to democracy were laid down. On the second front, armed struggle and popular uprising were endorsed as means for destroying, “root and branch”, the NIF regime. After sober assessment of the political situation on the internal and external levels, however, the NDA resigned to endorse the adoption of a negotiated comprehensive peace settlement as one of the means for bringing about the desired change. Instead of “uprooting” the Inqaz regime, the NDA, therefore, opted for the realistic objective of “deconstructing” it through democratic transformation, embedded in this settlement. The gateway is fair and free elections.

### **The CPA: Shortsighted Readings of the Political Forces**

The failure of the NDA in uprooting the Salvation regime through political and military means, due to organisational and organic reasons, laid the ground for reaching a negotiated settlement, though on separate tracks. Premised on the Machakos Protocol (20 July 2000), the CPA remains a watershed in Sudan’s contemporary history. The CPA marks the end of the First Sudan Republic and represents a milestone in the transition towards a democratic united Sudan, albeit on a new basis. The essence of the transformation embedded in the CPA is a democratic transition from authoritarianism to democratic polity. This should not be viewed as ‘regime change’ as happened in 1964 and 1985; rather, it is a ‘process’ of rebuilding the institutions of the Sudanese state: a task that cannot be accomplished in isolation from reconstituting the political space and reorganizing political entities and organizations, as well as building a robust and vibrant civil society.

Acknowledging the shortcomings and objective critique of the CPA, all Sudanese political forces must admit that the Agreement, if correctly comprehended, has availed them the opportunity (which may be the last) to safeguard the unity of the country, unless some of them entertain a hidden agenda. The responsibility of keeping the country united is squarely theirs. It is the failure in discharging these tasks that will wet the appetite of foreign powers, and open the door for external intervention, particularly since the CPA itself is a product of regional and international mediation and sponsorship. .

A common misunderstanding among all political forces, including in the SPLM, however, is that the CPA is an end in itself and not a tool for political and constitutional transformation. In this respect, the reactions of the different parties are quite telling. The “opposition” political forces, for instance, are unduly preoccupied with the power-sharing arrangements, which are seen to be skewed in favour of the Agreement’s partners, while condemning the CPA as “unilateral” since it precluded the participation of these forces. While, it seems to have eluded the NCP that the CPA is rather a vehicle for affecting the “deconstruction” process of the one-party system through the democratic transformation on which the Agreement was essentially premised. The SPLM, on its part, conveys the impression that the Movement has replaced the New Sudan vision with the CPA and has withdrawn into a cocoon, waiting for secession of the South. The CPA, therefore, is essentially a mechanism for transition towards a democratic polity. This would lead, depending on objectives and how the various political forces will use the post-CPA reality, either to upholding unity or to partition of the country, in the best of scenarios.

### **The Political Forces in the North**

It is true that the NDA’ specific objective of assuming power to implement its political program did not materialize. The new political reality consequent on the CPA, however, provides the NDA forces with a golden opportunity for realizing the Alliance’s grand objective of democratic transformation and cementing the unity of the country. The overall goal remains intact. Indeed, except for “interim” power sharing arrangements, the CPA has heavily drawn from, and was informed by the Asmara Declaration and the IGAD DUP, and satisfied the objectives of the NDA in three respects; 1) putting an end to

a devastating war, 2) democratic transformation, and 3) decentralization of governance by giving the south more powers, thus addressing the root cause of marginalization that ignited the war in the first place. The late Dr. Garang used to emphatically state, “Whenever I go to a negotiation round with the NIF, I wear two hats; the SPLM’s and the NDA’s”. Not only that, but the NDA program was even more comprehensive in its approach by instituting the foundation of a Sudanese commonality anchored in equal citizenship rights. Thus, in Asmara a consensus was reached on the question of the relation between religion and politics, a contentious issue and the key ingredient of “unity on new bases”. That was a remarkable breakthrough. While, it was the failure of reaching an agreement on this principle in particular, which laid the basis for the adoption of the “one country- two systems” model, which has been strongly criticized as a prelude to separation of the south.

If these were the principled positions of the NDA, one would wonder as to why some forces insist on distancing themselves from, and lukewarmly support the CPA? These forces are supposed to be “players”, even if not invited, and not “referees” or “spectators” in the process of the CPA implementation, and thus should make their “positions” clear on the fundamental issues, which they earlier endorsed in Asmara! Acting as a mediator when the unity of the country is at stake reminds southerners with the broken promises of the past, and confirms their long-held belief that northerners cannot easily shake-off the old habits of renegeing on agreements and dishonoring commitments. All the northern Sudanese political and social forces, including the Islamists, that aspire to the unity of the country are shouldered with the national responsibility of reaching a consensus on the relation between religion and politics for forging and cementing the kind of unity that would ensure equal citizenship rights for southerners and non-Muslims at large. If the unity of the country is at stake, what would prevent the Sudanese political forces from arriving at another breakthrough at this critical juncture of the country’s history? We can even draw from the experience of neighboring Egypt in striking the balance between basing equality of rights on citizenship and the aspirations of the Muslim majority in the country. The recently approved constitutional amendments in Egypt (March 2007) retained the controversial Article (2) of the Egyptian

constitution, which stipulates “the principles of Islamic Shari‘a as the principal source of legislation”. Though the article aroused the fears and suspicions of the Copts, it was embraced by a wide spectrum of the Egyptian political forces and supported by the Patriarch of the Egyptian Orthodox Church, as long as all Egyptians, regardless of religion, remained subjected to the same civil laws of the country, except, of course, those pertaining to the personal and family domains.

### **The National Congress**

The NCP cannot shy away from the stark fact that the CPA essentially is a tool for dismantling the one-party rule and monopoly of state power through democratic elections and peaceful exchange of power, unless it is believed that the party and the state are one and the same thing. The NCP can then compete with the others freely and fairly in a democratic test for each party’s acclaimed base of support and popularity. This is the essence of democratic transformation embodied in the Agreement and enshrined in the constitution. Drawing from successful stories of the Islamists, the NCP should strive to transform itself into a modern democratic Islamic party and shun its reliance on the state power in favor the power of the ballot. This is not far- fetched or implausible. Indeed, the NCP is itself a product of a long process of transformation, starting with the Moslem Brotherhood, then the National Islamic Front, which eventually gave birth to the NCP (and later the Popular Congress). The Turkish experience is also an enlightening experience. In other words, the NCP should use the CPA, as it was originally intended, to deepen democratic transformation through the CPA-based enabling structures and institutions to let all the people of the Sudan decides via fair and free elections and the self-determination referendum. It is implausible for the NCP to continue its grip on the state power through manipulating the interim CPA-based structures and institutions to control the rules of the democratic game, thus turn the elections results to their advantage. The Islamists are nationally obliged to articulate a socio-economic and political program that tolerates the others, and is sensitive to the cultural and religious diversity of the Sudanese society. The old slogan of the “civilizing mission” has already exhausted itself and in the process lost its appeal to the public. Otherwise, the NCP will historically be

held responsible for obstructing transformation, and endangering the unity and territorial integrity of the country.

## **The SPLM**

The SPLM, on the other hand, is equally required to translate its vision of “unity on new basis” in a working program and build a robust organizational structure on the national level. This is not to underestimate the profound challenges that the Movement is destined to face. The CPA has, thus, ushered the SPLM into a new phase/Republic with multiple transitions that need to be effectively managed. In the transition from war to peace, the Movement is facing a critical 3-fold transformation trajectory: from a military/politico organization to one that is politically-based; from regionally/ethnically-bound to a movement that is national in both character and outreach; and from opposition to partnership in government. The sudden and tragic loss of the Movement’s leader has compounded the burden of dealing with these multiple transitions. However, as the Old Sudan undergoes fundamental change in its transition to the New Sudan, the SPLM/A itself is bound to evolve and undergo fundamental change. So, while its basic content has remained the same, the SPLM/A has undergone a process of metamorphosis over the years, and in its various stages of transformation it appeared different to various people (*or interest groups*) at different times.

At this critical moment in the Sudanese history, the SPLM is obligated by virtue of its vision and supporters, as well as by the CPA, to promote the cause of unity “on new bases”. This is an obligation that the SPLM cannot shun without losing both credibility and popular support, besides seriously flouting the CPA. The only route for sustaining the unity of the Movement, thus the unity of the Sudan at large, is through genuine adherence to the New Sudan vision at the program and policy levels, and vigorous engagement in national politics. For the aspirants for either unity or separation of the south, their respective objectives would not be met through withdrawal or retreat from the center of power, where the fate of land and people has been, and is determined! Indeed, demand of the SPLM for an effective presence in legislative and executive institutions throughout Northern Sudan, and its participation in the governance of those states for the duration of the pre-elections period, was made with the objective of making it possible for the

Movement to advocate, on an equal footing with the NCP, unity of Sudan on new basis. Paradoxically, even for the “southern nationalists” would harvest the wind at the end of the day if the SPLM failed in making use of the powers, at the national level, accorded to it by the CPA. This is simply because the self-determination referendum) has to pass through the gate of elections. The outcome of those elections would be disastrous for the SPLM, as well for the cause of the “southern nationalists”, in case it failed to secure a comfortable representation in the national parliament. Otherwise, the CPA will turn into Addis Ababa Agreement II. Elections, however, add yet another national responsibility to the SPLM to initiate a process of national dialogue and political discourse with all the political and social forces. The objective is to arrive at a social contract that encompasses issues of the CPA, national reconciliation and democratic transformation as basis of national consensus. “Nationalism” is not a “northern” phenomenon!

### **Concluding Remarks**

I cannot conclude before making two important caveats. First, the intended focus of the speech on the political discourse on unity does by no means denote any underestimation on my part to the equally important social, cultural, and economic dimensions of unity. By extension, underlying the role of political forces only is not meant to belittle or overlook the tremendous responsibility of the civil society actors, in their various areas of competence, in cementing the social fabric of the Sudanese society. Secondly, I am also cognizant of the regional and international context within which the post-CPA situation is evolving and the roles of the external forces in the process. Indeed, the CPA itself has largely been a product of international mediation and pressures, maintaining the country’s unity, however, its implementation remains the national responsibility of the Sudanese political and social forces.

The message of these remarks is that the threat to unity is rooted in the failure of the Sudanese post-colonial state in establishing a national identity framework of governance accommodative of the country’s multiple diversities. The CPA, a product of a protracted struggle over restructuring of the Sudanese state, provides all the Sudanese political forces with the opportunity (possibly the last) to build the Sudanese citizenship-state; the

shortest-cut to unity. These forces must abandon wild speculations about the outcome of the self-determination referendum, which is believed to be a synonym for separation, and instead seriously contemplate the fate of the country if it fails to consummate the constitutional restructuring process, initiated by the CPA. It is only in the context an inclusive framework of governance that the ensuing political and humanitarian crisis can be approached and addressed. This would be unfeasible if not all the political forces seriously assumed their respective shares of national responsibility towards building a Sudanese socio-political commonality. These forces should act as “stakeholders”, and not as mere “beneficiaries”, of the CPA, if they were sincere in their call for the country’s unity. The Southerners then will self-determine to remain an integral part of this commonality. This is the task to contend with in order to keep the country united, albeit on new bases. Self-determination is not the culprit: the password is democratic transformation; elections and the self-determination referendum are merely the keys!

Finally, I also cannot afford not to share with you some thoughts on a couple of prospective research area since this gathering also marks the inauguration of the Sudan Policy Research Institute.

- Immediately after the departure of the late Dr. John Garang, a group, of what we call “New Sudansists” (denoting those who believe in the New Sudan vision, but not necessarily affiliated with the SPLM), loudly spoke about the imperative of establishing a policy research center. Dr. Francis Deng took a step further in a bid for keeping the discussion alive by contributing with a written-concept note. Besides commemorating the achievements and legacy of Dr. John Garang, the central idea is to promote the values, principles, and develop programs and policies, and strategies, embodied in the vision of the New Sudan. The vision of a New, United, Democratic Sudan provides an entry point for addressing the broader challenges facing the Sudan and the African continent. As a racial, ethnic, religious, and cultural microcosm of Africa, Sudan offers the possibility for reconciling on a country basis some of the dilemmas and contradictions of nation-building that plague the continent. This is a rich and wide research area that allows ample room for identification and prioritization of the pertinent specific research issues.

▪ “Popular” or civil society-based monitoring of the CPA is another pertinent, and perhaps mostly needed, research and advocacy project. The CPA is a turning point and a landmark in Sudan’s contemporary history as it denotes the most radical constitutional restructuring in the country since independence. It represents a milestone in the transition towards a democratic united Sudan, albeit on new basis. The novelty of the transition, predicated on the CPA, lies in the recognition for the first time of the root causes of the war, especially in the south, and that those root causes transcended the South. However, two years have already passed since it was signed, the CPA is showing signs of strain. The recent crisis that recently ensued between the two partners, following the SPLM withdrawal from the GONU, is indicative. Given the radically contrasting visions of the two partners in power, tension will certainly persist. Observers (both inside and outside the country) have recognized the selective and slow pace of the implementation process. The two parties to the Agreement themselves have problems that impact the implementation. The SPLM has to contend with all the organizational and programmatic hurdles inherent in the transition from peace to war. Though the CPA caters for the NCP’s continued dominance in Northern Sudan, it also provided for a significant opening of the political space and the sharing of the previously NCP-controlled state power and wealth. Despite being the most powerful and best-organized political force, the ruling NCP therefore finds itself increasingly threatened by the direction the country is heading to.

On the other hand, the rest of the political forces in Sudan particularly those brought to power in the earlier democratic transitions (1953, 1964 and 1985) – have never experienced a similar situation whereby management of the transition is out of their control. Not only that, but it is the first time that a political party with a large constituency in the South is to share power as a major partner of a party with a predominantly Northern constituency. The situation is further compounded by feelings among some main political groups and other opposition and civil society organizations - which were not signatories to the CPA but are now expected to take part in its implementation. These groupings have

been calling for an all-inclusive conference to endorse and build consensus around the CPA.

In light of these profound challenges to the implementation of the CPA, the overall goal of the proposed project is to keep all the Sudanese social forces (civil society), truly committed to peace within the country, diligently engaged to ensure the credible implementation of the CPA and counteract potential spoilers. Though the primary responsibility of implementing the CPA lies on the shoulders of the Parties, other key political and social actors are stakeholders in the peace process with a critical role to play. Though the CPA provides for a built-in mechanism to monitor the implementation process (the Assessment and Evaluation Commission), its composition, mandate, and diplomatic nature raises series impediment to the work of the Commission, particularly when the two parties have divergent views on the implementation process. Besides, the inter-governmental nature of the Commission is likely to emphasize diplomatic sensitivities that might understandably limit candid exposure of violations and recommendations of particular solutions and activities.

The specific objectives of the project/program may include: a) monitor the progress of, and identify impediments to the implementation of the CPA through collecting information from all relevant sources, b) disseminate gathered information to the Parties, other stakeholders, and the civil society (including political parties, trade unions and community leaders), c) engage and mobilize civil society, and consolidate public support to the credible implementation of the CPA by engaging civil society actors and all stakeholders to discuss emerging issues, and identify potential obstacles, appropriate solutions and resource needs, and d) garner the support of the international community (in terms of resources, attention and influence) through calling upon the good offices of numerous governments, institutions, statespersons, diplomats, and leaders of international and regional inter-governmental organizations.