

Sudan moves toward peace, democracy

In last week's *EIR*, Muriel Mirak-Weissbach presented an eyewitness report from Sudan, on the second session of the National Congress which met Feb. 16-19 in Khartoum. She, Uwe Friesecke, and Lawrence Freeman interviewed many leading Sudanese political figures, including former opposition leaders from the South who have now signed the peace agreement with the Khartoum government, and are working for national reconciliation. In this section, we publish two additional interviews.

The National Congress represents constituency groups from all over the country. It meets every two years to discuss policy issues, and to pose questions and make recommendations to the government. It elects 125 people to send to the Parliament.

The new leadership of the National Congress includes President Gen. Omar al-Bashir as chairman, and two deputy chairmen: Dr. Riek Machar, a former southern rebel leader from the Sudanese People's Liberation Army (SPLA), and Al-Sharif Zeinal-Abdin al-Hindi, secretary general of the Sudanese Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), one of the opposition parties. The fact that two former leading opponents of the government have now joined with President al-Bashir in this democratic forum, shows what an extraordinary political shift has occurred in Sudan. The British strategy for destroying Africa's largest country has received a very significant setback.

Interview: Angelo Beda

Success is a matter of political will

Mr. Beda is the Minister of Manpower in the Sudanese government. A Christian, he comes from the south. This interview was conducted on Feb. 21 by Lawrence Freeman, Uwe Friesecke, and Muriel Mirak-Weissbach. The transcript has been edited. For an earlier interview, see EIR, May 3, 1996, "Fact vs. Fiction about Slavery in Sudan."

EIR: Could you tell us your view of the importance of this National Congress for the future of Sudan?

Beda: First of all, thank you very much for coming all the way from the United States to our country, and for witnessing the running of the conference of the political system, the National Congress.

This conference is the second of its type since the searching for and establishment of a political agreement for the Sudan, which came after we had been fed up by the multiparty system, which we had twice, or three times, and then followed by military coups, and then a one-party system, which was run under Nimeiri. I think this system is aimed at gathering the Sudanese into many streams of political activities, with all their diversities. So, we have now tried this experiment for the last two years. This was the second conference in the last four years, and it was to review our experience, and to plan our future, and also to see the shortcomings of this system. So, it was a very important national review of our effort.

First, the conference is a manifestation of the Sudanese trying to get together by all means, in spite of their difficulties, all their diversities, and their racial and religious differences.

People are trying to discover how we can come together into a national forum, in which we can accommodate each other, especially since the country is so big. So this conference has succeeded in establishing this, that it is possible for Sudanese to come together, under a forum which admits everybody, without qualification, provided that you are Sudanese; regardless of religious feelings, origin, or tribal affiliation.

People have established the structure of a Federal system, and to combine centralism when it is necessary, and then dispense with centralism when we don't need it, so that the local districts, and the states, and the Federal system can react economically, politically, and socially.

The last [point to be stressed about] this conference is, the working of the system, that has attracted people outside it. In 1989, there was no confidence; 1990, no confidence; 1991, no confidence; 1992, no confidence. And then, we had international pressure on us, which was aimed at collapsing this effort of ours, and they organized our neighbors against us. But, as time goes on, and people see that we are pushing ahead, very successfully, we ended up uniting the south and the north inside the country.

And so, those outside have decided to respond. The first two groups came from the southern rebels, and they have joined to sign the agreement, called the Khartoum Agreement. The second is about to come, which was chaired by Sharif al-Hindi, who brought the initiative to the conference, and it was discussed and approved [see *EIR*, March 13, 1998].

So, we look forward to a bigger dialogue. The conference

will become a platform for a bigger dialogue with the opposition groups.

EIR: At the congress, Dr. Turabi outlined the new constitution, which will be presented in a plebiscite to the country, and which has to be adopted by the National Assembly. Could you outline some key features of this new constitution, how they will shape the future of the Sudan?

Beda: First of all, I think this will be the first time that we will have a constitution which contains a lot of consensus. This didn't come out of the blue: We started building from below, involving the Federal set-up, involving the political system, involving what type of distribution of sources can go to the people, what type of political individuals will participate in the political sharing of power. And then, how do you define the identity of the Sudan? Is it through the Islamic people? Is it going to be an Arab nation? Is it African? And so, the establishment in the constitutional set-up says that all Sudanese, regardless of our cultural differences and political differences, will participate in the affairs of the country, on the basis of their citizenship. I think this is the most important aspect of the constitutional set-up, as far as the Sudanese are concerned.

In America, you may talk of freedom, you may talk of other things. But, in the Sudan, it is really: How do we get to the level of a citizen, who is born a Sudanese, regardless of his or her racial background, or religious background, cultural background? This is the most important thing to us. And this has bogged us down, up to this date. This is the most important aspect of the constitutional set-up.

The second aspect is the opening up to accommodate others who may have confidence in what we are doing, and allowing them to submit their will to the agreement of the people. That is the core of the referendum. This one-man decision has been the problem, in Africa, and in other parts of the world. If you let the citizen decide on a referendum, that means you are trying to change bullets for the ballot. If you do, there will be no war, there will be no need for war, because the common will is stronger than a man just getting out on a certain Sunday, and then getting a gun, and beginning to shoot.

And the last, and the most important thing, is that this is an Islamic country. The majority of the people are Muslims. But, *it must be an Islam that must accept the will, the right, of the minority.* This has been established by decree, and it's to be included in this constitution.

EIR: This leads me to another question. I can foresee already, that in the Western press, people will say, "This Congress was really organized by Dr. Turabi, he worked out the constitution. In reality, this is just a continuation of the Muslim north dominating Sudan, and these provisions for federalism, in practice, don't mean very much." How would you respond to that argument?

Beda: That argument, on the face of it, is more apparent than real. If you respond to people outside, you will not be able to



Sudan's Minister of Manpower Angelo Beda, a Christian from the south: "This is an Islamic country. The majority of the people are Muslims. But, it must be an Islam that must accept the will, the right, of the minority. This has been established by decree, and it's to be included in this constitution."

solve your problem. It's better you look inside, at the realities that exist around you. Turabi is a Sudanese citizen, and his views are subject to other people's views, including from the south.

If you look at the Khartoum Agreement, you will see that most of the things which appear there are really too good to be true. Some of the things, like self-determination for the southern Sudanese, subject to a referendum, cannot be done in the United Kingdom! I'm sure that the United Kingdom could not accept a referendum on whether Ireland and Scotland will leave. They cannot afford this. But we are saying, let the Sudan go, and have a referendum after four years. I think there is no more sincerity than this. And even those who are criticizing, some of them cannot do the type of experiment the Sudanese have done, because it would be a risk for them, and I'm just pointing to the United Kingdom as an example of a state that cannot *attempt* to copy the Sudan, because if they do, they will disintegrate the same day. Submitting the United Kingdom, with its regionalism, to a constitutional referendum? I think that would be the end of Britain.

EIR: Now, could you give us a sense of the state of imple-

mentation of the peace agreement in the south?

Beda: The agreement is in two parts. The first is already implemented: that is, the federal declaration of 26 states in the Sudan, 10 in the south, and 16 in the north, and the appointment of governments to these, according to the law. The most important question to the southern Sudanese, is the election of their leaders. Because the problem was, that leaders were selected by northern people for the south. Now, the Walis, that is, the governors of the 10 states [of the south], like those in the 16 states [of the north], have been elected by their people. And now, consultation is in process, in each of the states, to set up a government, an assembly. That's the legislative body, and the executive body.

What is now going on, is, the formation of the Coordination Council, which is a body to supervise the 10 states, until the time of referendum. So, we think it is just a pity that one of the signatories to the agreement, that is, Kerubino, decided to put us to shame. [Maj. Gen. Kerubino Kwanyin Bol, a former southern rebel leader and early participant in the peace process, reportedly defected to the SPLA of John Garang early this year—ed.] Because our complaint against the north is that they don't keep any agreement. We were shocked to see that it is coming from our side: that the northerners have decided to keep to the agreement this time, and it is we who started to break the agreement by going to war. But, we consider this a small aspect of things that can happen anywhere, and we have insisted that we go on with the implementation of the Khartoum peace agreement.

So, to me, the process is going on, and the pace it is taking is according to difficulties we have in the Sudan. The Sudan is 1 million square miles. Everybody is wishing that we won't succeed: We are facing an economic embargo, we are dependent on our own resources. We expected people outside to sympathize with us, but we have learned a good lesson. This is the first time that we have decided to depend on ourselves, and I think that's the best way. If we can develop our resources by ourselves, and to live on our own strengths, I think this may be good.

So, I think given the resources we have, and given the means at our disposal, and within the political, economic, and social environment we have, we are doing very well with implementation.

EIR: How significant do you think it is that John Garang is still stubbornly refusing to be part of these negotiations for peace?

Beda: I don't know whether I can call it significant or not significant, but I think it is a contradiction in terms, as far as John Garang is concerned. We all think that what we have done here, is the result of the fighting. And this fighting was organized by Garang. The government that was cheating us, was overthrown, until this one came along and started really to respond to the call, to the needs of southern Sudan, asking what are the causes of the war, so that it could be able to solve

it. Getting down, seriously, to solving the problem of the war. I think we expected John Garang to respond. That's why I call it a contradiction, that the very people who were fighting John Garang here, when they were overthrown by this regime, who believed that they could solve the problem better than them, John Garang went and joined them in Eritrea, in order to fight this agreement.

For me, as a southerner, I will not talk about the significance of this. I think that the poor people of the south are very unlucky: They don't really have leaders. We thought that Garang was a real leader, who was fighting for his people, except that he has turned the south to be used as a lever for others to achieve their goals. And, this is why now, this process is only exposing him to be a utilitarian type of man, who can easily be used by high technology, by people who use the southern problem as a means to an end, as a means to overthrow Islam.

We don't care about overthrowing Islam, we don't care about overthrowing the government. But, for goodness sake, don't use us! Try to use other means, not at our own expense. We cannot afford it. Thirteen years of war! There are no schools!

In this, I'm now talking to you as if I were in charge. What we would do, is to issue an international call for education in the south. We need to have an international call, to all men of good will, Christian and Muslim, in the world, to see the havoc in the south caused by Garang. The whole territorial population, one-third of the Sudan, has been destroyed, politically, economically. And, as a result, the children, not less than three generations, have gone without education.

EIR: Southern Sudan borders on a region with Uganda, Congo, the Great Lakes region, which still has many other conflicts raging, like in northern Uganda. Do you think that your success in southern Sudan could affect that situation, and could be a symbol that peace, after all, is also possible for these situations?

Beda: Yes. I think that the Sudanese experience, of both sides realizing that they cannot win the war by fighting, that they should go to a self-determination type of agreement, to reach a consensus on matters, to sit down and find each side disagreeing, if they do, on really what are the causes of the war, and so on, and then coming to sign an agreement, and to respect that agreement within the country — all this would be a good example for Burundi's case, for Somalia's case, for the case of West African countries, like Sierra Leone, and so on.

If this message can be shared by our neighbors in Uganda and Burundi, and in Zaire especially, when the government has become only an agent of promoting privatization, I think the Sudanese agreement and peace in the south, will be the beginning of peace on the African continent.

EIR: How significant is the project of the Jonglei Canal for the south?

Beda: Yes, that is a very important project. The Jonglei Canal was a project which was to take away the southern Sudanese from a backward agricultural performance, to a modern sector of production in the field of agriculture. But the [“bucketwheel” excavating] machine, which was brought to Jonglei by the French government, is the biggest in the world. This machine had been destroyed.

This was the beginning of a serious step that was developing southern Sudan. And let me tell you: It is not the [peace] agreement that will solve the problems between the south and the north, or between Burundi and other people, or even in other countries. It is social and economic development. Because how can you really bring people to produce for themselves, and then enter the market, and develop a culture around it of how they can go on to produce what they call a civil society? If you forget this, and you just want to make people sign an agreement, the agreement itself cannot bring this thing about. It is the realization of development, and that’s why things like the Jonglei Canal going ahead, would be a solution to the southern Sudanese problem in another way.

Because it is an egg-and-chicken problem: The backwardness of the south is the cause of the war. And the war is also the cause of the lack of development. You don’t know where to start the question.

You must stop the war, in order to develop. But when you stop the war, people disagree and say they are backward, they go to war again. So, you have to break this vicious circle. The Jonglei Canal was a way of doing that. And, all you need is to keep some tranquility for two years, three years, four years, depending on what you call in economics the gestation period. Because when you invest today, you can’t get the fruits today; you invest today, and then after five to six years, which is the gestation period, you get the benefit, whether social benefit, economic benefit, political benefit, civilization benefit, society coming up, schools coming up.

EIR: You mentioned that John Garang was serving some outside interest. Would you care to mention who that might be?

Beda: Yes, from outside, sure. You see, it is very difficult; if you talk as a lawyer, where is the evidence? You will not be able to provide it. But when we accepted the Declaration of Principle, and we went to Nairobi to get the warring parties to the negotiating table again, we were expecting that the whole international community would be looking forward for us, to be very optimistic.

We got a very good reaction from the European Union, because they wrote this declaration in a letter, which came to us, saying that they were looking forward to a successful deliberation of the situation in the Sudan, so that it can affect also the relations between the Sudan and her neighbors. The European Union, they said, would be only too ready to assist if needed. We were very happy.

But, to our shock, we received a declaration from the United States, that it was imposing an economic embargo on

the Sudan, and then seizing assets, and then telling her that we are doing it in order to press you to agree! I looked at that as a provocation, as somebody who has very bad will, who doesn’t want the Sudan to have anything. And, that’s the time I personally felt that the Christian community did not care about the southern Sudanese.

The world looks at the fact that the southerners are Christians, and yet you see that a Christian society was not interested in the southern Sudanese people; they just wanted the war to go ahead.

So, this is the first time I believed that the United States was against the Sudan, and was against any progress of the Sudanese people. And that its aim is only to overthrow — call it Islam. But, we still appeal to them. We don’t stop them from hating the Sudan. But, to use the south, to use the poor people as a means, is a crime. It is not moral at all, that you can fight the Sudan through the south. You’d better fight it in other ways.

So, that position of the United States really damaged us, damaged the debate, and is a part of the factor that made us unable to agree, unable to reach progress in Nairobi.

The second people who are using Sudan, are the opposition, the northern opposition. Of course, the northern opposition party are those whose interests are only to rule in Khartoum. And they are telling John Garang, “Don’t discuss, don’t come to peace with this government.”

EIR: When you say northern opposition, whom are you referring to?

Beda: What is called the National Democratic Alliance in Eritrea. They are the political parties who are here, and have been removed many times by the military junta, as they were removed by this one. We have no quarrel with them. But, for them to tell the southerners not to agree with this government, and to say, let us work together to topple the government, and then we come, and only then will we start to talk about the problem—it’s really the type of thing which we think John Garang should not agree to. Because they will use us, just to come to power in Khartoum, and perpetuate the very crimes which they themselves committed, when they were in power here.

EIR: I want to ask about a recent initiative by Britain’s Baroness Cox. There was a report issued in the United States by an Israeli operative named Yossef Bodansky, which alleges that the Iraqis have sent chemical-biological weapons and Scud missiles, since 1991, to Sudan. They even say that some of these weapons are hidden in the area of Wau, in the south.

Now, this report is obviously false. It’s a fabrication, and it’s already been identified in the U.S., apparently, as a fabrication.

But, the point is, Caroline Cox took this report to the House of Lords three days ago. She said she had independent sources in southern Sudan who could confirm this. And she said, on the basis of this, she wanted the British government

to consider setting up in Sudan something like the UNSCOM inspections that they have in Iraq. It seems very clear that what Baroness Cox is trying to do here, is to create further provocations and actually increase the pressure on the Sudanese government, providing cover for further belligerent moves in the south against the government.

I wondered if you had heard about this, or if you have anything to say about this kind of activity on the part of Baroness Cox.

Beda: Yes, I've heard about it, but I have not been able to pay much attention to it, given my responsibilities, and the lack of information. So I will not be able to talk very seriously on it.

What I know, is that Baroness Cox had made accusations against the Sudan, about slavery, which made it clear that she, like other people, does not realize that this war is destroying the southern Sudan, more than it is affecting the north. She, like other people, does not know that if you talk about Islam, at this time, Islam is spreading in the south more than at any other time. And so, if you are a Christian, to develop the churches, it is better to stop the war, than to try to create extension of it. So, this is all that I know about it. But I think, from the way she behaved on the slavery issue, one should think twice before taking seriously anything that Baroness Cox does on any program related to the Sudan.

EIR: Your government has set up the Southern Coordinating Council for these 10 states. What is going to be the relationship between these states and the Federal government, over this four-year period?

Beda: The relationship will be, simply, that the Coordinating Council will represent the President in the south. That some of the powers, or most of the powers of the Presidency, of the Federal set-up, will be transferred to the Coordinating Council. And so, the President will deal on a closer and more sympathetic basis, not really having to pass it through a bureaucracy, to make things very easy.

EIR: You have been a leading politician and activist from the south. You're also a Christian. Do you feel confident that this effort, this constitutional process that's come out of this national congress, is real, is viable, and that it should be supported by everyone in this country and the West as well?

Beda: Yes. I have not only been a longtime politician, since 1978, but I have witnessed each and every government since independence, as an intellectual, as a civilian, as somebody from southern Sudan.

I think what was lacking, was political will. You see, to do anything in the world, if political will is not there, you are wasting your time. Because of the pressure the Sudan has suffered, really. Garang doesn't know what he has done; that if he came now, he would be a hero. But southern Sudanese are not well educated, they can be used by high technology. But if he were independent and were to come, Garang would be a great man in this country.

And so, the political will for the first time has emerged. The First Vice President, who died recently in a plane crash, has been wept for by all of us. I was with him in a very isolated town, called Bor, about two months ago. The statement he gave there — unfortunately, there was no press there, so it was not reported. What [the late First Vice-President] al-Zubair Mohammed Saleh said in Bor, about the Sudan, was historic. He said that the Sudanese people have suffered a great deal, and they will never again come back to suffer like this. So, let the southerners decide among themselves whether to remain as part of the north, or to go. If this is a statement by the First Vice President, and he said it among the southern Sudanese, what better confidence-building agreement can there be?

So, I'm talking of *will, political will*, which is not written, but is identified in the hearts of those who are in power. The only thing is, that if you prolong the war, and you bring the wrong people in again here, then things will be spoiled.

When I go abroad, to the ILO conference, and I hear somebody in Geneva saying there is slavery in the Sudan, I have no respect for such a forum. I told them, how can you receive somebody who is so politically motivated, when you could easily visit Juba and see for yourselves?

So, to answer your question, I think the political will that has developed in this regime, has never existed before in the past, and I'm afraid it may wane, it may wane, if it does not get the right response.

Interview: Samuel Aru Bol

Southern leaders are working with Khartoum

Mr. Bol is a member of Sudan's National Congress, representing the United Democratic Front, Salvation Front; he comes from Lakes State, in the south of Sudan. He was with rebel leader John Garang in the Sudanese People's Liberation Army (SPLA), in Nairobi, Kenya, from 1994 until recently, when he returned to Khartoum to join the National Congress and work toward unity of the nation. This interview was conducted in Khartoum on Feb. 20 by Lawrence Freeman, Muriel Mirak-Weissbach, and Uwe Friesecke. The text has been edited and abridged.

EIR: Mr. Bol, you just attended a National Congress conference. Could you tell us what you consider the most significant developments coming from that conference?

Bol: The most important development was that the National Unionist Party, a party of great importance in the Sudan, a part of the Democratic Unionist Party, has joined the government