

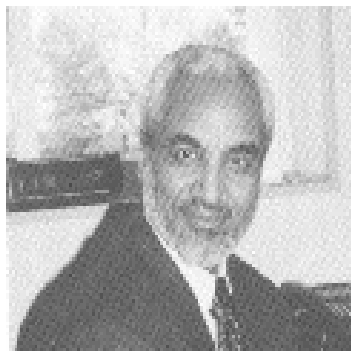
In My Opinion...

Celebrating Peace in Sudan

To read about or observe televised scenes of the exuberant celebrations that greeted the signing of the Sudan peace agreement in Nairobi in early January is to comprehend more fully the depth of sorrow and loss suffered by so many for so long in that awful two-decade long conflict that killed an estimated two million people and drove more than four million from their homes. Ending such anguish is surely worthy of celebration.

Equally appropriate, however, were the cautionary words from many seasoned observers of African conflicts who stressed how difficult will be the challenge of implementing the agreement in ways to make the celebrants' hopes a reality.

Among those harboring such hopes are the Lost Boys of Sudan who have been resettled in America over the past few years. I was reminded of the longing expressed so poignantly and graphically in posters produced by many of those attend-



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ing a reunion we sponsored a couple of years ago. Amid maps of his old and new homelands, Benson Deng, who was then enjoying the peaceful bliss of San Diego, California, as a beneficiary of this nation's refugee resettlement program wrote: "One day peace will win the war in Sudan."

Now that it has—at least in the southern part of that vast country—let us hope that the agreement will serve as a model to help resolve other conflicts on the continent. Such an extension of peace ought to begin, of course, in the western Darfur region of the same country now being

applauded for finally abandoning its policies of suppression and dominance in the south. As noted by Leslie Lefkowitz of Human Rights Watch, many of the tactics now being used in Darfur—scorched earth campaigns with ethnic militias attacking on the ground supported by government forces bombing from the air—are akin to those that ravaged the south for so long.

At the signing ceremony, Dr. John Garang, leader of the main rebel group and now assuming a vice-presidential post within the government, said the peace agreement belonged not only to the people of Sudan but also to the whole of Africa and the international community. Sudanese President Omar Hassan Bashir pledged to re-launch a new nation where the distribution of wealth and leadership will cut across all spheres of society.

Many elements of the signed agreement were included in several previous draft peace protocols, all deferred, rejected or ignored until finally, as Garang said in Nairobi, all parties recognized that a win-win peace was attainable, with the old Sudan heading blindly into an abyss of irreversible fragmentation.

Under the new agreement, the government in Khartoum will abandon its policy of imposing Islamic *Sharia* law throughout the country, share fully the nation's oil revenues and allow a six-year period of self-rule in the south, leading ultimately to a referendum in 2011 to determine whether the nation will remain whole, or divide into separate entities.

Achieving this "new beginning" in Sudan has required enormous sacrifice and concerted efforts by a host of mediators from many nations, including members of the African Union now attempting to end the fighting in Darfur. Sustaining and expanding the peace will require close monitoring and effective engagement by all who share the hopes and dreams of Machien Luoi of Fargo, North Dakota, another of the Lost Boys who attended our reunion. His poster included a drawing of the flag of his homeland with this statement: "Peace, Liberty, Unity Justice for all is all we want in the new Sudan, like our friends Americans do."

Sudan Peace Agreement Paves Way for Return Of Thousands of Refugees

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watch Sudan's Vice President Ali Osman Taha and Sudanese People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) leader John Garang sign the agreement.

Sudanese men burst into chants, while women ululated with joy. Refugees waved flags and danced. Young men staged mock fights to celebrate the end of the real fighting that has claimed an estimated two million lives, including many deaths from starvation.

The comprehensive peace agreement paves the way for more than three million people displaced within Sudan—as well as more than 500,000 refugees in neighboring countries—to go home.

"This is the happiest day of my life," said James Alier, a 58 year-old Sudanese refugee from Upper Nile. "I have not been to my country for more than 10 years and now it is time for me to go."

Refugees cheered loudly as Garang told them: "There will be no more bombs falling from the sky on innocent women and children."

Although the signing ceremony in the Kenyan capital was carried live on both Kenyan television and Sudanese television, some refugees made the trek from Kakuma refugee camp in northwestern Kenya to witness it for themselves.

"I have come all the way from Kakuma to see with my own eyes," said Gideon Kenyi, a Sudanese refugee from Equatoria. "I do not want anybody to tell me what's going on," he added with a smile.

In Kakuma itself, home to some 65,000 Sudanese refugees, the peace breakthrough was celebrated with lively music.

UNHCR was represented at the Nairobi signing ceremony by Jean-Marie Fakhouri, UNHCR's Director of Operations for the Sudan Situation, Eddie Gedalof, UNHCR Deputy Representative in Kenya and Mohamed Dualeh, head of the South Sudan Liaison Unit in Nairobi.

"It was exciting to see the joy of the Sudanese people at the ceremony," said Gedalof. "We hope that with the conclusion of the peace process, conditions will

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