

'Peace is Better than Unity' - Post-referendum Sudan*

P 'Peace is better than unity' was the slogan with which the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) came to power in Addis Ababa in May 1991. Notwithstanding the unfortunate hostilities that later emerged between Ethiopia and Eritrea, the Ethiopian leaders have been vindicated by electing peace rather than continued war in order to maintain territorial integrity.

Contemporary history reveals that the territorial integrity of any country or the unity of its peoples cannot be imposed by force of arms. The era of imperialism and local despots has gone for ever. Sudan had been a colonial construct since 1899 when the conquering Anglo-Egyptian forces re-occupied northern Sudan and extended their rule southwards and westwards to engulf South Sudan and Darfur respectively. It will be recalled that 'Equatoria' was until 1910 part of the 'Lado Enclave' under the Belgian crown, while Darfur was annexed to the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan in 1917 after the defeat of Sultan Ali Dinar.

Independent Sudan (1956) had the opportunity to remain one stable and prosperous country. But the ruling political elite remained oblivious to the country's multiple diversities. It insisted on defining the country along the two parameters of Arab and Islamic orientations. The policy to construct a highly centralised state based on these parameters precipitated civil wars initially in southern Sudan and then in other parts of northern Sudan, notably southern Kordofan, southern Blue Nile, eastern Sudan and finally in Darfur.

In fifty-five years of social and political engineering, the Sudanese political class has failed in the state and nation building processes. That more than 99 per cent of South Sudanese voted for secession in the referendum which leads to Sudan's dismemberment epitomizes this failure. The turbulent history of the Sudanese state formation may have been a factor in the South Sudanese decision to break away. However, governance, and good governance for that matter, remains the

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determinant factor in Sudan's stability as a state and nation. Governance rooted in the country's multiple diversities could have been the only guarantee for Sudan's unity and viability.

So when we speak of the consequences of South Sudan's secession, it is important and indeed imperative to focus on the future rather than on the past. The emerging two states, both the predecessor and the successor states, each carries the virus for future instability and possible dismemberment. The South Sudanese have been running their affairs independently for the last six years, thanks to the comprehensive peace agreement (CPA). The political elite have committed grievous mistakes of government that jeopardised the opportunity for mitigating the negative consequences of war.

Following the tragic death of Dr John Garang, a paradigm shift from liberation to a power agenda occurred, triggering a power struggle between the factions. This manifested itself in the widespread insecurity in southern Sudan, ethnic conflicts, corruption in government and society, lack of social services, and so on. No wonder that some spectators of the Sudanese theatre passed the verdict that South Sudan would emerge as a failed state. It was only owing to the civilised and orderly manner with which Southerners behaved during the referendum that some of these people changed their minds. The ruling political elite in South Sudan must change their *modus operandi* if South Sudan is not to slide back into anarchy.

Similarly, the ruling political elite, particularly the NCP, should draw a serious and honest lesson from the secession of South Sudan. A modern state cannot be built with the instruments of political domination, oppression and social dis-

crimination. The voice for South Sudanese secession grew louder only during the Ingaz regime. This was precisely for lack of accommodation of different views, while at the same time projecting an Arabo-Islamic identity on the South Sudanese. The mistakes of the 1950s and 1960s should not be repeated. The strong calls for regional self-rule coming from Blue Nile, southern Kordofan and Red Sea states should be heeded, and appropriate responses formulated immediately, lest they are transformed into calls for secession. The war raging in Darfur must be addressed immediately.

Looking at the region, South Sudan should build good neighbourliness with the countries with which it shares common borders, including northern Sudan. This will create conditions necessary and conducive to its immediate and accelerated social and economic transformation. This is because, all along, the borders have invariably divided the same ethnic communities. These communities such as the Azande in CAR, DR Congo; Kakwa and Pajulu in DR Congo and Uganda; Madi, Acholi and Dodoth in Uganda; Taposa and their cousins the Turkana and Karimajong in Kenya and Uganda respectively; Nuer and Anywaa in Ethiopia; should become bridges for social, economic and cultural cooperation and integration.

The communities living in the north-south border areas, and who have for a long time been involved in proxy wars, should be encouraged to look at where their interests for survival lie. The Messiriya, the Rezeighat, the Kenana and all the nomadic communities who spend most of the year in some parts of South Sudan will have to change their attitude towards their neighbours in the South. In fact, both governments should work together to permit free and unhindered access and to transform by peaceful means any resource-based conflict which may arise from time to time.

The independence of South Sudan is a precedent likely to trigger similar claims in other parts of Africa. One would not like people with similar historical claims

to independence and freedom to suffocate in unity on account of the OAU doctrine of the inviolability of colonial borders. Nevertheless, should the ruling political elite in a particular country fail to accommodate the concerns of their disadvantaged citizens (minorities), secession becomes an inevitable option. However, this option should be carefully weighed against other important factors of state viability. In this respect, the African Union should engage actively in the resolution of endemic conflicts, particularly those with an ethnic and religious streak that threaten the territorial unity of member states.

Most of us are sometimes passive spectators of the social and political engineering undertaken particularly by radical political and ideological groups that come to power. Nevertheless, opportunities exist for influencing the course of events. The National Council for Higher Education and Scientific Research and the Ministry attach importance to the Peace Study Centres established in some of our universities: the Hafad University for Women, University of Khartoum, Univer-

sity of Juba, Nyala and Fasheir Universities in Darfur. Peace and conflict transformation and resolution studies should take centre stage in the coming period. I am glad that CODESRIA, UNECA and ARRF have been involved, from the very beginning, to provide the necessary resources and expertise.

In the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, we are developing a policy paper to be submitted to both governments – GOS and GOSS – for endorsement. The concept is for both governments to permit higher education institutions, particularly the University and the Faculty, to continue as the vital and lively link between the two countries beyond diplomatic and economic relationship. This will facilitate joint research activities in different spheres – research whose results should inform policy. In this respect, one envisages that South Sudan's secession and its consequences at the local and regional level, particularly its impact on the regional security architecture in the Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes, should constitute an important research theme. Under this wider theme,

peace studies can be undertaken, entailing such issues as cross-border cattle rustling, small arms and light weapons trafficking, as well as other social and cultural studies which promote understanding and harmony.

We would want to suggest to the leadership of CODESRIA to hold this forum on a permanent, regular annual basis, and to take on board studies of such sensitive but unavoidable themes of Afro-Arab relationships in the context of the simmering conflicts in the Afro-Arab borderlands of which the conflicts in Darfur, Mali and Niger are part. We cannot afford any more to bury our heads in the sand. The uprising in Arab North Africa is likely to influence events in the Sudan and the rest of Africa as people cry aloud for human rights and political freedoms.

* Speech delivered at the CODESRIA-UNECA-Africa Research and Resource Forum Workshop on the 'Consequences of the South Sudan Self-Determination Referendum for Sudan the East and Horn of Africa Region' held in Nairobi on 28 February-1 March 2011.

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