

United States Senate

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Statement of Senator Russell D. Feingold

For U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom's hearing entitled
Sudan's Unraveling Peace and the Challenges to U.S. Policy

I am very pleased that this hearing is focusing on Sudan's fragile Comprehensive Peace Agreement, and I applaud the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom for organizing it, as well as for its work to bring attention to abuses of freedom around the world. Ensuring the complete implementation of the CPA is essential not only to prevent a return to war in southern Sudan, but also to provide stability throughout the whole of Sudan and the wider region. The breakdown of the CPA would be devastating for ongoing efforts to bring peace to Central African Republic, Darfur and northern Uganda.

We all held our breaths in May when violence erupted between members of the Sudanese Armed Forces and Sudan People's Liberation Army in the oil-rich Abyei region. An estimated 60,000 people were forced to flee as Abyei was looted, bombed and burned to the ground. Despite knowledge that tensions were rising in Abyei, the roughly 10,000 peacekeepers of the United Nations Mission in Sudan were strikingly absent and a non-factor in the events that ensued. There was no buffer to stop a return to full-scale war.

Fortunately, the parties quickly reached a deal in June to begin withdrawing their troops and to refer the boundary dispute to the International Tribunal of Arbitration, allowing some people to return home. However, this flare-up demonstrated that the calm brought by the CPA remains shaky at best and that Abyei, the Nuba Mountains and other flashpoints in this conflict remain highly combustible. There remain too many arms and armed actors in these areas that are capable of undermining efforts to establish a durable peace. At the same time, many institutions devastated by war have not been rebuilt and deep-rooted poverty persists. Without measures to address these underlying problems, these flashpoints will remain highly vulnerable, especially as the 2009 elections and 2011 referendum grow closer.

This is not to suggest that progress has not been made, for it has, thanks in part to the good work of Special Envoy Williamson and many others in the international community. The recent agreement over Abyei, the realization of the census and steps toward the national elections next year are all positive developments. In addition, over the last three years, many former combatants have gone through the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process. The CPA, regardless of

its flaws or fragility, still provides a working framework for the parties to cooperate and move forward toward a shared peaceful future.

The task for United States policy, both in the final days of this Administration and the beginning of the next, is to coordinate our ongoing efforts for peace in Darfur while providing renewed backing for the implementation of the CPA. We must continue to demonstrate, both in terms of our diplomacy and resources, a commitment to rebuild southern Sudan's institutions and support the approaching elections. Simultaneously, vigilance is required in monitoring Sudan's flashpoints. We must work with our international partners to ensure that UNMIS forces step up, not draw down, when tensions escalate. We must also work with our regional partners to constructively engage all stakeholders and transform the culture of impunity.

It was a willingness by this Administration in 2001 to bring high-level attention and resources to resolving Sudan's North-South conflict that helped make the Comprehensive Peace Agreement a reality. The work of Special Envoy Jack Danforth and his team demonstrated what is possible when we muster our tremendous diplomatic and foreign assistance resources toward conflict management and peacebuilding in Africa. Now, with that agreement under threat and violence persisting in Darfur, we need a new surge of sustained high-level leadership. Today's hearing is an important step toward that goal and I hope it will help us move toward a comprehensive approach to Sudan.