

Sudan Press Conference: Statement of Rep. Donald Payne (D-NJ)

Really great to be here this morning and to see so many interested parties here. And I'd like to just commend the commission for the outstanding work that you've been doing in so many areas. Let me say that I'm pleased to be here and commend you for holding this very important press conference to announce the recommendations designed to ensure that the fragile peace between the Khartoum government in the North and the northern and southern regions is sustained and strengthened - the fragile peace that we have there. And as we know, it is very fragile.

I also want to thank the commission and the folks here for your continued focus on the crisis in Sudan. I cannot begin to speak about the ongoing crisis in Sudan without putting the situation in context - I mean the human context, which is what we are so concerned about. Two million people have died, as we know, and more millions have been displaced in the war between the North and the South, which lasted for 21 years. And Dr. John Garang gave 21 years of his life and then, tragically, lost his life 21 days following the peace. Even up to today, there is really no accountability of what happened to John Garang, and really no accountability of the 21 years of death and destruction that was perpetrated by the government in the North.

In Darfur, an estimated 450,000 people have been killed in a genocide that began six years ago. There are children who were born six years ago who are still living in the camps. They don't know what it means to go to school, they don't know what it means to live in a normal community, and there's still no accountability from this same government that presides in Khartoum. Five years ago, we declared genocide was underway in Darfur. Yet, we have not succeeded in achieving an end to the violence, the destruction and the genocide continues and lives, and communities are still in destruction and disarray. We've certainly failed as it relates to the situation in Darfur.

There is, of course, the question of justice. And as they say, what is justice without peace? But inversely, you know, what is peace without justice? We need to have a balance of the two.

We cannot ignore one, peace, at the expense of the other, justice. We need to have justice and accountability for Darfur and for the South. There are those in the National Congress Party - NCP, formerly the NIF - that have committed atrocities. There are others who have committed atrocities in Darfur, atrocities in the South, but there's no accountability.

We must allow the ICC to move forward with the arrest warrant and to see how the government of Sudan will respond. Will they dramatically change the situation on the ground and deal effectively and transparently with the issue of justice? This remains to be seen. Justice is important, but at the same time, we cannot forget that people in the camps cannot wait for justice. We must have action and we must have action now. As for U.S. policy and the new administration in place, we will have an opportunity to make a turn in our policy, hopefully.

I think that there's been confusing policies as relates to Sudan. On one hand, we have one agency in our government which extends an invitation and sends a U.S. taxpayer-funded jet to bring the head of the intelligence agency of Sudan to Virginia, when the same person is the one who was responsible for the accommodations of Osama bin Laden and the one who sort of led the Janjaweed. So we have a policy that's very confusing to me, and I would imagine, to other people in our country and, particularly, around the world.

And so the commission's recommendations are very important. One of the main issues about the special envoy - I know the commission recommendation includes the naming of a special envoy, and I was one of the main ones pushing for a special envoy with a strong, clear mandate in the past years. But let's review what's happened: We've had four special envoys in the last eight years. A special envoy is not going to change the situation; it's been more symbolic, and if we have a special envoy, we have to have a special envoy that has a clear purpose.

And I believe we've had excellent people. You couldn't find more competent persons who have been appointed. But if you don't have the support of the administration behind the special envoy, in my opinion, another special envoy is certainly not the answer. We need to have a clear policy, I guess, is what I'm saying, so the envoy knows exactly what we stand for and what we want to do. We need a united government behind that policy; we need to have a well-integrated and clearly defined approach to Sudan. We can't have the intelligence and military people saying one thing and the Agency for International Development and others saying something else. There has to be a single, clear policy if we're going to have a successful implementation of what we intend to do.

We also need to beef up our presence in Juba. We must also have good representation that can follow-up on policies we recommend in Khartoum. According to the CPA, the elections are supposed to take place in July of this year.

They must be transparent elections.

The question is whether Sudan is ready for transparent elections. How can we have an election with a president accused of genocide standing for president?

He's a candidate - the leading candidate, at that. How can we have an election when you have over 2.5 million people barely eking out a living in camps, practically living in prison? How can Sudan hold elections with disputed census data and no border demarcations?

These issues should be resolved.

We have five months for these things to happen. If not, we should be open to considering other options. This time around, our engagement with Sudan should have both extremes on the table. We need to be prepared to take the necessary steps to end the suffering.

We also must be prepared to engage the government of Sudan with clear mechanisms in place to ensure that the agreements are kept.

If engagement fails, we must be prepared to use what other options we have at our hand. At this juncture, we must have something real and credible.

We must not shy away from doing what is right; the people of Sudan cannot wait and should not wait any longer.

And so I think that it's going to be very, very important that the new administration focus on a clear policy. As I've indicated, there were too many mixed signals in the last administration. We had good people but we did not, in my opinion, give them the backing and the support, and more importantly, a clear policy direction that they should take. It was really unfair to the special envoys. We almost set them up to fail. And so I certainly, once again, appreciate the commission's interest in this very, very important issue. And with that, let me thank you for indulging and, as we say, I'll yield back the balance of my time, which I doubt if I had any left.