

## Hearings on Religious Persecution in Sudan: Mr. Dan Eiffe Oral Testimony

February 15, 2000

(Note: These are unedited and uncorrected transcripts)

MR. EIFFE: Thank you very much.

I am very honored to be called here today. My story is a very personal one and as such much different from other people's.

I have spent 12 of the last 14 years in the bush of Southern Sudan. I have been at the front lines most of that time. I have seen many massacres and bombings--I have been bombed many times myself and buried in the ground. On four occasions, I was the only Western aid worker left behind--that is not boasting, but it is showing you the amount of danger that was there. I look back and think I was either mad, or God was certainly sitting on my shoulder.

It is a very difficult story and a painful story. I am working for Norwegian Aid. I am an Irishman, and Irishmen are very passionate people. It is very hard not to have passion when you see the suffering. I have been a Catholic priest, and I did not intend to be involved in Sudan for 14 years. I went there for a 3-month consultancy, and I found the most beautiful and rich cultures one can imagine, and dignified people have been really brutally denied their human rights.

I was 10 years prior to that as a priest in South Africa detained under apartheid as a priest, fighting for black rights. South African apartheid at its worst is nothing compared to Sudan. Sudan is the hell of the world--there is no question about that--it is the hell of the world, and this suffering should not be allowed to continue.

Tragically for us relief workers, wherever we are in Sudan, these people's lives are in our hands--hundreds of thousands of lives have been in my hands. As the report from USAID has said, we are the ones there with that support who make the important decisions on the ground. And then, sometimes, you feel used because politicians outside don't listen. They give us more money for relief, beans and oil, and the

problems continue year in, year out, with no political decisions having been made.

I remember one time saying in Nimule in 1994, when hundreds of thousands of people were fleeing into Nimule, and I was sitting there, weeping. I said: You can keep your beans, your maize and your oil. The Uganda boys are behind me, and we need guns to fight. This was genocide.

There comes a time when people have a right to defend themselves, and the Southern Sudanese have a right to defend themselves. As Peter was talking about now in his home area, where over 200,000 of his people have been displaced, with gunship helicopters bombing the villages in the Upper Nile area, in the Bentiu area, their struggle is an incredible struggle, and they are fighting for survival.

I often ask myself, too, why we get so involved in places like Kosovo, and we forget about the Sudan, where over 2 million have died and 4 million have been displaced. We call them "the living dead." What can we do to stop it?

They are dying in Sudan not because they are poor, but because they are very rich--Peter's area is an extremely rich area. The Southern Sudan is full of riches. It has a population of only 8 to 9 million people and is the size of America east of the Mississippi line, with an area of 320,000 square miles.

My point today will be to bring to you what is this Government in Khartoum; what does the National Islamic Front represent. They are not a government. They are not representative of Sudanese society. In the history of Sudan, they have never won more than 15 percent of the democratic elections. They seized power in a military coup in 1988, and yet the UN and others recognize them as the Government today. I wonder how we came into that situation.

Do you think you can reform the National Islamic Front Government? First, you can never believe them--you cannot believe them. We heard from Peter about dishonored agreements. There was an internal peace agreement--they broke it. Before that, Numeiri [ph.] broke the agreement. The history of Sudan is one of deception. It is not just the National Islamic Front. It is governments who deceive the Southerners time and time again. The Southerners come and try to make peace talks, try to go to the peace talks. The IGAD peace talks--we have had 10 rounds of Abuja-1, Abuja-2, and the IGAD peace talks--and what happens? They will go back home

again. They come to Nairobi for shopping sprees, and they make fools out of people like ex-President Carter in Nairobi who says there is a cease-fire.

I remember the cease-fire in 1994. I could not get from my bunker to the radio room where President Carter was saying there was a cease-fire. That was in June 1994. The Government was announcing they were in Nimule. I was living in Nimule. They hadn't arrived, thank God, or I would not be there.

That is what has been happening time and time again. People who come out there say I am being naive, and they are brilliant in this charm offensive. You might wonder why a humanitarian worker is so political. I never set out to be. I didn't go out to Africa to be a priest, to be a politician, to be a rebel leader. But we are talking about people whose lives are in our hands. We have to call a spade a spade, and there is no good going around it here and there. The suffering of the Sudanese people has got to stop. It has got to be stopped. It cannot go on and on.

And I repeat again, you cannot reform a National Islamic Front Government. Firstly, how can they abandon the *raison d'être* for their existence, which is Islamic fundamentalism? That is number one. No Government in Northern Sudan wants the South's gold, its vast riches. The bottom line in Sudan is they want the land without the people. I have seen the massacres. I have seen the horsemen coming into Bahr-el-Ghazal 2 years ago, 400 horsemen, taking women and children, burning them, shooting them, killing the men. I have seen massacre after massacre. I have seen the camps in 1992-1994, where they came through. We had Congressmen there, Senators, from America; we had ambassadors there from America; and the media. I was the one taking them all around. And then, this happens, and nobody says anything about it. Nobody says anything about it.

I thank God I am here today to be able to speak to you, not for myself, but for those people in Southern Sudan. This has to stop. Do you want to know how you can stop it? You can take that government out. You remove that government. And to do that, you support the Democratic forces in the South. You try to bring unity to certain groups of the SPLM and SPLA, and Peter as well--bring unity to the Southerners, bring them together, and the National Democratic Alliance. There are forces for democracy in Sudan, large forces. The SPLM/SPLA control over 600,000 square kilometers. If you drive through those areas now, which were freed in 1997, there are markets, hospitals, food production, and wonderful things happening on the ground. The administration is set up, and it is progressing. Do not think it is just a bloody war on the ground, with chaos and a mess. The people of Sudan have initiative. After one year of being freed, they are already producing surplus food.

I would like to come to the issue of what can be done as well. I support USAID and I take my hat off to Dick McCall and to USAID; they have the right approach to Sudan. They are supporting governance, civil administration, economic issues, civic education in terms of the youth, where two generations of youth have lost their education.

The USAID policy is okay if it can be strengthened; it can be further supported. They have all the right ideas. When I am sitting at meetings in Nairobi with the European Union, and the issue is education, it is always USAID: "We have something for that." For governance, it is USAID. But the European Union does not have the support for this. So this is where USAID policy is extremely important in convincing the Europeans to follow that policy.

Now USAID is supporting education, and I would say that that is number one in Southern Sudan. We have two generations who have lost education and are totally illiterate. There is very little support for education. Education does help transform a society and to build up a new society. It is not very political, and it is very, very feasible with the resources given to USAID.

I have mentioned many of these things in my paper regarding Operation Lifeline Sudan. Operation Lifeline Sudan has done much good work, but it needs to be de-linked from the political manipulation of Khartoum. It has to be de-linked from that.

I would like to come to one point which I know is contentious--who are the SPLM/SPLA? I suppose I am in a position to talk about this. Very few people talk about them. In 1991, I was nearly killed by them in Juba. They were shelling me, and I was lying on top of two of my children, so I can tell you I didn't like them very much at that time.

But I have come now to respect them as a movement, as with also Peter as well. If Southerners would--and I appeal--come together and realize that Sudan is a nation-state. We need the Nuer people, the Dinka people, the Equatorians, and the beautiful peoples of Sudan to come together and not elect to let them go on like this. Together, they are strong, but divided, they are very weak. This is part of the problem for the U.S. administration and other governments, Peter. They don't have to deal with you because they here about a faction here, a faction there. We've got commanders in Nairobi all over the place. I don't know what they're doing in Nairobi. I am sure Daniel arap Moi is not very happy having the SPLA commanders in Nairobi forming factions; it has become a bit of a joke. It confuses the outside world, sending out contradictory messages. Not everybody can be as expert on Sudan as individuals like myself who are so involved.

I am speaking very fast, by the way; I hope you can understand my Irish accent.

I would hope, therefore, to support the administration and judiciary. On the ground, a lot is happening. There is a proposal now before USAID to support the judiciary in Southern Sudan, the training of legals and paralegals--we are in discussion with USAID on these issues--also for support of local government structures and training. I would say that in all the groups--I think we really have two groups now in Sudan; we have the SPLM and SPLA, and we have Peter's group the Nuer area. What has happened recently with the Nuer group is very good, and I am very happy with that, because for 9 or 10 years, I was very disappointed, I can tell you. John Garang used to ask how can you make peace with yourself; you know in Sudan that if you don't have international observers, they will break it up. It was obvious to all of us that the Government would dismantle this peace agreement in time, to the betrayal of many people in the Nuer area.

I thank you for having me here, very, very much, and I really want to thank the American administration and the wonderful Congressman and Senators whom I have had the great privilege to take around Sudan--and sometimes even share a cold beer with them in the bush in the midst of all the suffering and have a good laugh--and to be able to come before you to speak about this.

I will ask you to be courageous and decisive and to realize what you are dealing with in the NIF. They are bent on the destruction of the people of Southern Sudan, and they are not representative of any large group in the North or the South. They have to be removed; otherwise, the people of Sudan will not survive.

Thank you.