

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

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(Note: These are unedited and uncorrected transcripts)

I am Daniel Eiffe, representing Norwegian People's Aid (NPA) in Sudan. I have worked in southern Sudan since 1987. During those years, I have witnessed the most brutal treatment of the southern Sudanese at the hands of the Government of Sudan (GOS). In the past thirteen years, I have been in the front line of the war assisting the civilians fleeing from their villages, displaced camps, etc., into neighboring countries or into new camps which were established for them.

Probably

more than any other single person, I have seen the full brutality of the war. In September 1991, I fled with the survivors from the Bor massacre of the Dinka people, which was orchestrated by the GOS. In 1992, they pushed hundreds of thousands from eastern Equatoria to the camps known as the Triple A. I was instrumental in establishing those large camps in 1992. Again in 1994, the GOS overran those camps and pushed 200,000 people out of the area. The purpose here was to drive the civilians out of Sudan. We managed again in 1994 to establish rudimentary camps on the border of Uganda. On three occasions -1991 in Bor, 1992 in the Triple A camps, and 1994 in Nimule -I was the only international aid worker who remained behind to assist. We were bombed and shelled continuously. We as an agency were all that was left between the destruction of these people and their survival. Thanks to the international aid we received, hundreds of thousands have survived in those areas. While the Sudan war has been known as a "Forgotten War," courageous journalists have risked their lives to report on the terrible brutality of the GOS on innocent vulnerable people, mostly women and children. I am forever grateful to those journalists.

The

southern Sudanese have suffered more than any other people I know of. Their suffering has become endemic. Their land is rich the people are the poorest and most backward in Africa and in the world today. They have, however, some of the richest and most indigenous cultures existing today. They are dying, not because they are poor, but because they are rich.

The Sudanese throughout the South that I have met are the most dignified human beings. Their rich cultures and history, their tremendous suffering, and their struggle to defend their lives and identity, their land, and their few belongings are as remarkable, as much as they are inspiring.

The

war perpetrated on them since 1955 is a war of genocide. The bottom line in Sudan is that successive regimes ruling the country want the land but without the people. A study of Sudanese history brings this point home very quickly. You have to ask yourself why should such diverse African cultures of the South, with their absolute poverty, the poorest guerrilla movement in the world, take up weapons. In the process, 2 million people have died, 4 million have been displaced (we call them the living dead because of their desperate condition), and more than a million have fled abroad. They are fighting for their very survival in the remote jungles of southern Sudan, where bombing raids, Arab militia attacks, government offensives, the denial of humanitarian aid, slave raids, etc., have become the government's war strategy. This is a heartbreaking scenario, year in year out. I get so frustrated as I join with these people their story and their struggle to survive. I am pleased to be able to speak on their behalf, but that is a heavy price for me and for my family, my wife (who is Sudanese), and my twin sons. My story today is rather personal and is an appeal to you to do everything possible to end the war, and to see the war and the GOS for what they are. There are people here in the United States who come to Sudan and listen to the Government of Sudan and believe that these people can be persuaded. They are naive beyond relief! When you leave them, the Government officials proclaim another cease-fire, and yet they continue to bomb and attack and deny access to relief supplies from going into secure areas. The UN complies with their strategy as do those who believe you can reason with these guys, and reach an accommodation. This strategy is immoral and a betrayal of the people of southern Sudan.

I

was in Nimule (Eastern Equatoria) in June 1994 when former President Carter, hosting the peace talks in Nairobi, declared on Friday a cease-fire. The Government of Sudan believed when talks resumed on Monday they would be in Nimule. We were bombed and shelled into our foxholes in the ground. I ran a few times to my radio between the attacks to let the BBC and VOA know what was happening to us.

Again

in 1997, President Carter was coming to meet Dr. John Garang in the newly captured town of Yei. I had taken the secret service agents around the town to show them the location and how safe it was. President Carter was coming from Khartoum via Lokichogio. His plane was refueling there. As the secret service agents radioed to Mr. Carter to come into Yei so he could deliver his message to Garang from Bashir, two MIG fighter planes bombed us a number of times. I hid in the foxholes with Dr. Garang and a team of journalists. The GOS, I believe, used Mr. Carter to trap Garang. I believe this is very serious. Dr. Garang has become the Mandela of southern Sudan, and his loss would throw the liberation movement into disarray. He risked his life. He smiled at me afterwards, and said that's what he expected.

Naivete,

wishful thinking, bear dangerous consequences for the survivors of the war. People have to look carefully at the statistics of this war and those who support this regime, namely Libya, Iran, Iraq, China, and personnel such as Osman Bin Laden, who has extensive economic investments in Sudan.

SUDAN PEOPLES LIBERATION MOVEMENT/ARMY (SPLM/A)

You

hear all kinds of things about this movement. In 1991, I was very critical of them. Today, I respect them as sincerely trying to find a solution to the war. These men are a poor army, unpaid and often unfed. They are up against enormous odds, and they are all that stands between their people's survival and their destruction. I know this movement and all its members very well. I am also familiar with its past misdeeds, many understandable given the nature of the society and the poverty and stress associated with war in the jungles of southern Sudan.

They

are fighting to defend their people's lives, dignity, and land. They are not fighting for power; they are fighting in self defense, and at such a cost. They have grown and are still in this process, tackling issues of human rights, governance, etc. Let no one say they are not representative of people there. While we for 17 years argue over what we should do about the war, it is the SPLM/A that stands between the people's survival and their enemy. If they had waited for us or the UN Security Council, there would be no one left in the southern Sudan today, and the war would have moved into the next phase, which is forcing Arabization/Islamisation into Uganda and Kenya, etc.

Recently,

in January 2000, peace agreements were made, between Sudan and Uganda. Then more than 1,500 of the Lords Resistance Army moved into Uganda from Sudan, banned, to wage their brutal war in Northern Uganda. No one can argue convincingly that one can negotiate with the Sudan Government. Judge it by its actions not by its rhetoric. Abel Alier, the first president of the South after the Addis Ababa agreement in 1972, a respected lawyer and elder, has written his book called: Dishonored Agreements. He had believed in the 1972 agreement. Again, Mr. Riach Machar, who broke from the SPLM/A in 1991 and formed a coalition of opposition groups, signed a peace agreement with the NIF regime, ostensibly recognizing the right for self-determination of the South. The NIF regime made him a Vice President; three weeks ago he resigned, stating that the GOS was not abiding with the terms of the agreement.

This 1997 peace process from within was hailed by many and in particular by the GOS as a step forward in the search for peace. Dr. Garang was then depicted as the war monger. History reveals the reality and the foolishness of those who believed

they could trust this regime. Again some people are naively believing that Bashir's triumph over Al Turali may open up some new possibilities with regard to ending the war. For southern Sudanese, it matters little which personality or which ideology is in power. Successive government regimes have wrestled with the South and not one of them could deal with it. They all eventually collapsed.

IGADD

It is in vogue to support the IGADD peace process. There have been more than ten rounds of peace processes from Abuja I to Abuja II, etc. The declaration of principles were agreed to in 1977 by the GOS long after the SPLM signed them. The SPLM prepare their papers and come to the peace talks, the GOS posture, postpone them, and finally attend them. Then they are again postponed as a new technical committee has to be established in order to review the process. It goes on and on. Now at last there is an office established to monitor the process. The reality is no Islamic Fundamentalist regime can agree to abandon the very raison d'etre for their existence, and therefore agree to a secular constitution, which is an absolute prerequisite for peace in Sudan. Again the issue of self-determination poses an equally contentious issue. While there was serious distrust between North and South when the war began, it has increased now in the South to the extreme. Would any Northern Government risk a vote on self-determination? No one would want to be blamed for losing the South. Again, it is complex as now Egypt and Libya have become more active on this issue. The SPLM and the people of the South now view themselves as a nascent state, and I believe from observation that the current process is unlikely to be reversed. The search for a solution in the peace process has not been wholly without results. It has helped to identify and crystallize the issues that have led to the conflict and that if not possible to solve would lead to a natural separation of the South.

In order to reach a deal with the NIF and the SPLM if it were at all possible, it would only help to entrench the NIF regime and also help to legitimize and broaden its political base within Sudan. You also then exclude other opposition groups in the North and some small ones in the South. A more comprehensive roundtable conference is needed if the Sudan is to remain as a whole if a lasting resolution is to be found. This is not possible with the current Government. They are not a legitimate Democratic Government. They seized power in a military coup in 1988; in past elections they never achieved more than 15 percent of the vote; so how have they become a recognized government today?

The SPLA/M, described as rebels, have more legitimacy within the country recognized within the NDA and most representative of the Southerner's aspiration.

I would like to conclude the first part of my testimony with a quote which I feel captures it well. It is from the Catholic Archbishop of Khartoum addressing the French Bishops' conference in December 1999:

"When one identifies and defends the human dignity, cultures, religion and human rights of the people of southern Sudan and at the same time those who represent them take up arms in their defense, you are branded as a rebel. "

For ten years, I was working for justice and peace as a Catholic priest in South Africa. I experienced the worst excesses of apartheid from 1977-87 as the authorities clung to power. The worst excesses of apartheid are like a tea party in comparison with the suffering Sudanese.

What can be done?

Humanitarian Aid

1. EDUCATION

More than two generations of youth have lost any hope of education. There is an urgent need to tackle this issue. Only a few and very rudimentary bush primary schools are in existence today.

2. Humanitarian aid needs to be delinked from the political/military considerations of the GOS. The United Nations Operation Lifeline Sudan continues to be breached by the GOS. Many fully secure areas have been denied access for up to three years now. The southern operation should be independent of the northern sector.

3. There is an urgent need to move more resources away from costly relief/emergency aid programs. As a result, nothing remains to be seen on the ground after \$2 billion has been spent. USAID policy to support food production locally needs to be supported more.

Training

Support for programs that improve human resource development need to be strengthened. Skills training, particularly for young women, will prove critical for the future with the need for additional funding for appropriate community development programs.

In short one could argue validly that humanitarian assistance, while necessary, at the same time has become a part of the problem in Sudan.

Nuba Mountains

The United Nations should no longer tolerate the lack of access into SPLM/A controlled areas of the Nuba Mountains. The bombing of an elementary school on February 9, of this month killing 16 children, demonstrates the GOS's attitude toward the people there, which does not qualify for humanitarian aid. On the other hand, humanitarian aid is given in camps in the government-held areas. Those camps -- known as "peace camps" -- qualify better as concentration camps. Food is most clearly used here as a weapon to subdue and break down the spirit and culture of the Nuba peoples.

SPLM

GOVERNANCE

There are serious proposals put forward by the SPLM department of legal affairs to support its efforts to establish the judiciary. These proposals are currently before USAID. The organs of law and order need to be developed whether southern Sudan secedes or not. Development and human rights cannot progress far without a favorable environment being established. Large areas under SPLM/A control for many years have been trying to establish a court system and to develop legal and paralegal systems. There is a total lack of finance for this, which results in continued problems.

ADMINISTRATION

There is furthermore a need both to train local administrators and to support the institutions of local government. These programs have been proposed but receive little or no support. The SPLM have established

themselves in 80 percent of the south (over 600,000 square kms). Some of these areas have been under their control for 10 years now. They have established systems of administration but they need further assistance, particularly with training in areas of local government -- and taxation systems, etc.

SPLA AND OTHER OPPOSITION GROUPS WITHIN THE NDA.

History has proven that only when the opposition forces, which can legitimately be called the forces for democracy, are supported, does the regime seriously seek a political solution. The GOS, with its increased revenue from the oil, will prove more arrogant and can likely up the stakes in the war. Resolution (No 75), should be explored fully so that those who are committed to the principles of a liberal democracy be strengthened. There are people within the U.S. administration who fully know what needs to be done.

Conclusion

I hope you have the courage necessary to do everything which you can to bring this brutal war to an end. There are suitable partners to explore the options to bring peace. The lack of moral and political will in the past to tackle this remote problem should not be allowed to continue. It can no longer be known as a forgotten war .

I thank in conclusion the representatives of the U.S. government who have come to see for themselves the situation on the ground and who have worked hard to get some positive results to end it. I also thank the media in the United States, many of whom I had the privilege to assist and who helped through their reports to bring to the world' s attention both the consequences and injustice inflicted upon the civilians by the war in Sudan.

Glossary of Terms

GOS

Government of Sudan

IGAAD

Intergovernmental Association for Desertification and Drought conducts the peace process with Kenya, chairing along with Uganda, Ethiopia, Eritrea and now Djibouti has joined.

NPA

Norwegian People's Aid

The

NPA is an NGO founded by the trade union movement 60 years ago. It has a strong political base supporting such values of solidarity, freedom, justice and peace. It maintains close dialogue with the SRRA/SPLM and works independently, without GOS approval. It is critical of the UN, OLS operations and how they have been manipulated politically.

UN/OLS

United Nations/Operation Lifeline Sudan

UN/OLS

began in 1988 when an outcry arose when 300,000 southerners died. It was formed as an umbrella to assist more than 30 NGOs who work in the south. It has an agreement with both GOS and SPLM. The GOS maintains the right to veto relief flights on a monthly basis, and it does so routinely into many areas. It also denies UN access into the Nuba Mountains.

LRA

Lords Resistance Army

An

extremely violent rebel group with bases inside Sudan. They raid and ravage villages and people in northern Uganda. They have abducted thousands of children and killed many thousands of people in a most brutal manner.