



UNITED STATES COMMISSION ON  
INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

**Sudan: Crisis in the Peace Process requires Strong U.S. Engagement**

**Remarks by USCIRF Chair Leonard Leo**

Good morning and welcome. My name is Leonard Leo and I am the Chair of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom. Last month, I and two other Commissioners traveled to Sudan to meet with government officials, both NCP and SPLM, to get a firsthand account on the future of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement. Unfortunately, we returned convinced that lasting peace in Sudan is in jeopardy.

On the fifth anniversary of the CPA, and with one year remaining of the interim period, we at the Commission have called on the highest levels of the U.S. government and the international community to act with greater urgency to see the full implementation of this historic accord. If the CPA fails, and it could, Sudan could all too easily see the North-South civil war reignite.

The bipartisan, federal U.S. Commission has had Sudan as a major focus of attention since it was established by federal law a decade ago. The Commission found the abuse of religion for political purposes to be a major factor in the civil war that ravished Southern Sudan and the North-South border regions from 1983 until the signing of the U.S.-brokered CPA in January 2005.

That war's millions of victims – two million dead and four million forced from their homes – were overwhelmingly from minority religious faiths – specifically Christian and traditional African religions. The victims also included Muslims, especially in the Nuba Mountains, opposed to the Islamist policies pursued by those in power in Khartoum. The horrific human rights abuses perpetrated in this civil war were similar to the abuses that grabbed the world's attention in Darfur. Both regions have been economically and politically marginalized by

*The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom was created by the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 to monitor the status of freedom of thought, conscience, and religion or belief abroad, as defined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and related international instruments, and to give independent policy recommendations to the President, Secretary of State, and Congress.*

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Khartoum. And in the wars in Darfur and the South, we have seen the government's bombing raids on civilian villages and targets, the government's use of forcible mass starvation and government-backed raping and pillaging campaigns against entire villages, all of which have forced millions of Sudanese into refugee and IDP camps where they are exposed to additional hazards. In December the Commission undertook its fourth trip to Sudan. We knew before we left for Khartoum that due to the National Congress Party's bad faith, we would be arriving during a period of heightened tensions between it and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement. We also knew we would be present during an extended National Assembly session in which several vital pieces of legislation remained to be passed for the holding of free and fair elections this year and the referenda and popular consultations next year.

What was unexpected was our being present during NCP brutality against peaceful protestors in front of the parliament.

One of our first meetings in Khartoum was with Yassir Arman, leader of the SPLM's Caucus in the National Assembly. The next time we saw Arman was after he had been arrested and beaten by the security forces under the NCP's control. I saw firsthand the bruises on his legs and arms and the lopsided gait with which he carried himself after being kicked, including in the head, and beaten with a baton. Arman was among a group of National Assembly members, state legislators, and other officials who had attempted, on December 7, to present a petition to the Assembly's Speaker calling for urgent action on the needed legislation. These officials were later joined by activists from many of Sudan's opposition political parties.

On the day of the assembly, our Commission delegation witnessed Sudanese security officers—police, national security, and army—being driven into Khartoum in unmarked vehicles to suppress the demonstration. We saw streets blocked to prevent ordinary citizens from assembling peacefully in support of the petition.

Reportedly, dozens of women were beaten with batons once they were loaded into police transport vehicles. There were also reports that journalists were forcefully prevented from accessing the demonstrators and had cameras confiscated preventing a full reporting of the government's heavy-handed actions.

And during the day's events, security forces ignored the calls of SPLM government officials to stop these illegal actions.

What ironies and deep injustices we witnessed in Khartoum. While legislators were being detained for peaceably expressing their views, an indicted war criminal--the current governor of South Kordofan--freely roamed the lobby of the best hotel in the capital, meeting with officials and passing by security officials here and there without a care in the world.

Such actions underscore the NCP's lack of good faith and fair dealing on CPA-required agreements. This raises several questions about the NCP's commitment to Sudan's constitution and international human rights obligations, but also to the CPA.

As we all know, today marks the fifth anniversary of the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, and the beginning of the final year of the interim period before a referendum on self-determination for Southern Sudan, a referendum on whether Abyei will remain in the North or join the South, and popular consultations for the two contested states of Southern Kordofan/Nuba Mountains and Blue Nile. So much remains to be done in this crucial, final year.

The first elections in Sudan in more than 20 years will be held in April. We are greatly concerned that these elections will not be free, fair or credible, and that they could indeed result in renewed violence.

Preparations must be made for the referenda and popular consultations in 2011. These preparations include setting up the referenda commissions in a manner agreeable to the NCP and SPLM, registering voters, educating citizens on the referenda and popular consultations, and organizing monitoring operations.

The North-South border remains to be demarcated, and the experience of the Abyei boundary should put us all on our guard that the NCP will likely try to delay doing so. The international community should be steadfast in requiring the timely implementation of this border and the implementation of the Abyei boundary. The U.S. government and international community must also be steadfast in its support for the negotiations over the post-2011 issues such as oil revenues, citizenship, cross-border seasonal migration by people and their livestock, and the Nile waters. These are vital issues in Sudan, and failure to come to terms on these issues, should the South declare independence, could very easily lead to the break-out of war.

And we can't forget about the importance of assistance to the South and contested areas in this next year. Insecurity in the South and Southern Kordofan/Nuba Mountains state is rising. Capacity building assistance is badly needed at the regional, state, and local levels in Southern Sudan and the three contested areas. More than 50 years of economic marginalization and decades of civil war have left Southern Sudan with tremendous development needs which require a herculean effort to address. The international community must commit, not only pledge, to a serious development surge.

This is an important year for Sudan and these are not simple issues to resolve. Failure is not an option, as it could lead to a return to large scale, even genocidal bloodshed and add a new tragic chapter to Sudan's history. Full CPA implementation is the only means to address the political and economic marginalization that has gripped all areas in Sudan outside of Khartoum, including Darfur. We urge the U.S. government, including Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, and the international community to act with urgency to provide the leadership that this situation

requires. Tactics of delay must not be tolerated. Real pressure needs to be brought on the NCP to act in good faith.

Thank you.