



THE SUDD INSTITUTE

RESEARCH FOR A PEACEFUL, JUST AND PROSPEROUS SOUTH SUDAN

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The Dialogue Brief

July 14, 2017

South Sudan: A Framework for International Cooperation

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It is now widely recognized that there is an increasing call for regional and international action to end the current crisis in South Sudan. This is a crisis that has inflicted and continues to inflict on the people untold suffering, death, and destruction. Resisting regional and international involvement cannot be in the interest of the Government and people of South Sudan. Nor is it advisable for regional and international actors to take unilateral measures against the will of the Government and people of South Sudan. That would entail a confrontation that would only complicate and aggravate matters, with no real winners. What is needed is a partnership between the Government and the international community to join hands and strengthen collective capacity and ability to bring a speedy end to the suffering of the people and the devastation of the country.

Not only have the South Sudanese people suffered greatly from the current conflict and its dire humanitarian consequences, but so too have international partners and foreign nationals who are residing in the country. Despite the hardships, these individuals are here to share in the suffering, risking their lives, and striving to make a contribution to the peace, security, stability and development of the country. Even more significant is the role played by the region and the international community to end the long war between North and South Sudan and help the people of South Sudan obtain their independence. The Government and people of South Sudan will remain forever grateful for this historic support. It is also important to recognize that the entire sub-region is adversely affected by the current conflict in South Sudan and stands to benefit from its peaceful resolution.

For these reasons, instead of seeing regional and international involvement negatively as unwarranted interference in internal affairs, it should be positively perceived as a well-intentioned offer to help a country and people in need. What is called for is a constructive engagement that would turn the crisis into an opportunity for the country to receive the needed regional and international support and partnership in addressing the challenges involved. The objective of such partnership is, and should be, to end the conflict, unify the country, consolidate peace, security and stability, support the speedy delivery of badly needed social services, and initiate a sound program of accelerated economic development.

Three practical considerations are pivotal to the stipulated constructive engagement and cooperation with regional and international partners. First, no regional or international action that is not based on the consent of the Government and the people of South Sudan can succeed, as it is bound to be resisted by a variety of means. This can only aggravate the crisis and increase the suffering of the people. Second, to circumvent the negative implications of potential confrontation, it is critically important for regional and international actors to win the cooperation of the Government, and to assure the leadership that the sovereignty, security, stability, and territorial integrity of their country can best be guaranteed by regional and international involvement and partnership. The reverse is also true; confrontation with the region and the international community can only lead to animosity, depletion of the capacity to respond to the crisis, and more suffering for the people.

In this connection, whatever collective arrangements are envisaged should prioritize peace as an overriding objective, and delicately balance promoting accountability with ensuring the security and general welfare of the leaders and pivotal stakeholders, whose cooperation is critical to the success of the efforts toward peace and the sustainability of any agreed arrangements.

Third, throughout the long history of internal conflicts, from which the people of South Sudan have suffered for decades, the organizational structures of their traditional societies and their indigenous cultural values have endured and contributed significantly to the resilience and survival of the people. Anthropologists and social scientists claim that the indigenous peoples of South Sudan are well known for their egalitarianism, segmentation, and the autonomous self-administration of ethnic groups, clans, lineages, and families, down to the level of the individual. These are societies that are intensely proud, independent and resistant to the concentration of power and domination by a centralized authority. While these are positive attributes that indicate an inherently democratic culture, they also make it very difficult to govern the people. They indeed pose major administrative challenges to the rulers and require great sensitivity and respect for the will of the people. South Sudan must therefore develop a constitutional framework and administrative structures that build on these social organizations and related value-systems.

This also means that if regional and international cooperation focuses only on the national leadership level, and ignores connecting to these local communities in ways that assure them that their concerns are being adequately addressed, then the entire program will be put in jeopardy, which will breed further acrimony and mistrust. To bridge the state-society divide, the Government, regional, and international actors will have to be equally committed to putting the South Sudanese people at the center of their concerns and actions and, through a broad-based community-oriented consultation and dialogue, enable the rural masses to contribute toward determining the direction for the popular democratic governance of their country.

On a personal note, I must say that cooperation with Governments and national authorities, with relevant responsibilities for their national populations, guided me in discharging my very sensitive United Nations mandates, first as Representative of the U.N. Secretary-General on Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) for twelve years, and then as Under-Secretary-General and Special Advisor of the Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide for five years. The concern of Governments about potential threats to their national sovereignty was central to both mandates. Instead of adopting a strategy of confrontation with Governments to promote human rights and provide protection for populations under the threat of genocidal conflicts and mass atrocities, I focused my efforts, with relative success, on securing the cooperation of Governments on the basis of the fundamental principle of Sovereignty as Responsibility.

Sovereignty as Responsibility means that the primary responsibility for protecting national populations lies, in the first place, with the Government of the State concerned. The role of the International Community is to assist the State to enhance its capacity to discharge that national responsibility. However, if the State lacks the political will or the operational capacity to discharge its national responsibility, and does not request or at least welcome outside assistance, with the consequence that its people fall victim of massive suffering and death, the International Community will not stand by and watch without some form of intervention, even at the risk of overriding sovereignty. On the other hand, such intervention is extremely costly in both human and material terms and is therefore unattractive, not only to the countries threatened with intervention, but also to potential interveners. This is why it tends to be avoided as much as possible. Therefore, in the interest of safeguarding their sovereignty, it is advisable for Governments to adopt a more constructive approach. Also, for the international community to be effective in its involvement in the internal affairs of countries, cooperation with the Governments of affected countries is not only the most prudent course of action to take, but is also the most realistic, pragmatic, and practical.

To conclude, national sovereignty can best be guaranteed by Governments discharging, their national responsibility to protect and assist their needy populations. When necessary as a complement to national responsibility, regional and international involvement must be based on the consent of the Government, the leadership, and the people of the country concerned. It must also aim at promoting peace by balancing reconciliation with accountability. Additionally, it should foster building institutions of good governance that make effective use of indigenous values and institutions to create a bottom-up inclusive democratic system.

Also critical is creating professional and accountable armies and police forces that ensure the safety, integrity, and the fundamental rights of all ethnic groups, without discrimination. Finally, and as a matter of urgency, consolidating peace must also entail a robust program of service delivery and socio-economic development that will provide tangible peace dividends to all the peoples of the country, without any discrimination on account of ethnicity or region.

About Sudd Institute

The Sudd Institute is an independent research organization that conducts and facilitates policy relevant research and training to inform public policy and practice, to create opportunities for discussion and debate, and to improve analytical capacity in South Sudan. The Sudd Institute's intention is to significantly improve the quality, impact, and accountability of local, national, and international policy- and decision-making in South Sudan in order to promote a more peaceful, just and prosperous society.

Author's Biography

Francis M. Deng has recently been assigned the position of South Sudan's Roving Ambassador after having been the country's first Permanent Representative to the United Nations. Prior to that, he served for five years as the United Nations Secretary-General's Special Advisor on the Prevention of Genocide at the level of Under-Secretary-General. From 1992 to 2004, he served as Representative of the Secretary-General on Internally Displaced Persons. His first position in the United Nations was that of Human Rights Officer in the Secretariat from 1967 to 1972 when he was appointed Sudan's Ambassador to the Nordic Countries. He was also Sudan's Ambassador to Canada and the United States of America and was also Minister of State for Foreign Affairs for five years. After leaving his Government's service, he held a series of positions in leading think tanks and universities in the United States. Dr. Deng graduated with an LLB (honors) from the University of Khartoum to which he was appointed member of the Law Faculty and then sent abroad for post-graduate studies. He holds an LLM and a JSD from Yale University Law School. Dr. Deng has authored and edited over thirty books in a wide variety of fields and has written two novels on the crisis of national identity in the Sudan.