

National Dialogue Creates New Potential For Sudan

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On Monday October 10, Sudan celebrated the conclusion of the historic National Dialogue intended to give birth to a New Sudan and new constitution. Joining Sudan's President Omar al Bashir on the dais were the heads of state from Egypt, Uganda, Chad and Mauritania, all who spoke in support of the agreement along with representatives from Russia, China, Ethiopia, and the Islamic Cooperation Organization.

The following day, President Bashir was seen dancing at an outdoor rally in front of cheering crowds. A senior member of the ruling National Congress Party-(NCP) told this author that the significance of this agreement is second only to the founding of Sudan in 1956 when



Sudan liberated itself from British colonialism.

President Bashir also announced extending the cease fire between government forces and military opposition groups in Darfur, Blue Nile, and South Kordofan until the end of the year. Resolving the long standing internal armed conflict is essential for Sudan to proceed to the vital task of developing its flailing economy improving the living standards of its people.



The lack of attendance and press coverage by the United States and Europe was notable, but not surprising. The US led sanctions against Sudan that are inflicting undue hardships on the population and strangling the Sudan economy remains a critical obstacle for Sudan's advancement on the path of progress following the remarkable accomplishment of the National Dialogue.

The Monday conference and signing of the National Document in Friendship Hall is the culmination of a more than two year process that began in July 2013. Recognizing the need

for the NCP to initiate a transformation of the country after suffering economic and political difficulties following the separation of South Sudan, President Bashir called for a far reaching and transparent National Dialogue in January 2014 to re-examine fundamental concerns of the population. These included issues of peace, unity, the economy, external relations, freedom of speech and press. One of the most important concepts that was addressed is that of citizenship and identity. As one member of the Umma Federal Party participating in the National Dialogue told me that they decided to reaffirm that “we are not Arab nor African, but Sudanese in Africa.”



Seventy-four political parties and thirty-four armed movements joined the dialogue. Three armed rebel groups refused to sign the National Document; the JEM, the SLA, and the SPLM-N, but the opportunity for them to sign will remain open. The political side of the dialogue was conducted in the “seven plus seven plus one” discussions between the NCP and the opposition parties and movements. For the society at large, tribal leaders, religious groups, NGOs, unions, civil society, respected individuals, and citizens were invited to join the dialogue. Women represented a large minority-33% of participants in the process.

Sudanese from all parties and sections of society are hopeful that National Dialogue will finally lead to peace and stability in Sudan, which has been hampered by internal strife for approximately fifty of their sixty years of independence.



A new constitution will be written with new laws to embody the fresh conceptions that have emerged from this multi-year process. Supported by the platform created by the National Dialogue, Sudan has a propitious moment to articulate and implement a visionary national economic program to realize its full economic potential and lift its people out of poverty.

To help unify the nation, which has suffered from years of civil conflict, all parties should coalesce around a program for investment in the most vital categories of infrastructure; electrical power, railroads, water management, roads and finally cultivate Sudan’s huge amount of fertile land that has never been fully exploited. Such an infrastructure led developmental approach will not only increase the productivity of the economy for the benefit of all citizens, but will provide meaningful productive employment that will give the youth hope for the future.

Sudan's current participation in China's Maritime Silk Road through Port Sudan provides an advantage for economic growth as China's "One Belt-One Road" global infrastructure policy is already transforming the world. President, Xi Jinping has announced China's intention to eliminate poverty in Africa. Let the New Sudan adopt this mission as well.

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