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Darfur-Darfur Dialogue, the litany of AU deceit

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Nov 14, 2006 — On November 9th 06, and in a cosy conference room in the luxurious Friendship Hall in Khartoum, the AU Commissioner for Peace and Security Ambassador Said Djinnit, formally launched the Preparatory Committee of the Darfur-Darfur Dialogue and Consultation (DDDC). The Committee is to be chaired by the eminent AU expert Mr. Abdul Mohammad. Back in El Guneina, west Darfur, and at the same time as Mr Mohammad was being introduced to his audience, the government army and their allied Janjaweed were completing their preparations to attack the IDP camps around 47k north of the capital of the state.

In an impressive speech in the Friendship Hall, Mr Mohammad was presented to the audience by AU Commissioner Djinnit as “a man of wide experience who also played a key role in the negotiations during the Darfur Peace Talks in Abuja in particular with regard to the Darfur Dialogue, that he was the right candidate for the job for many other reasons including the fact that he was familiar with matters relating to this part of Africa”.

Mr Mohammad then proceeded to outline his vision of the DDDC that he now chairs. His vision consists of five points: “Participation of all Darfurians, flexibility in discussing problems, effective participation of the international society, not to use the conference as political tactics and over passing the events and tragedies of the past”.

Having known Mr. Mohammad personally during the talks in Abuja, I must

Admit that he gave some hope about the AU and its future. I still wish to think that Mr. Mohammad represents a new generation of African leadership that celebrates integrity, justice and honesty.

Under different circumstances, the launching of the DDDC could have been a landmark in the implementation of the DPA. However, given the current status of the DPA, Mr. Mohammad’s DDDC project leaves us bewildered if not ashamed of the AU and its leaders. That the DPA is flawed is so clear cut that there is no need even to substantiate it. Neither Mr. Mohammad nor AU Ambassador Djinnit has the luxury to hide behind ignorance regarding this matter. Mr. Pronk told them categorically that the DPA is “paralysed and does not resonate with Darfur People”. And according to a different source, well over 70% of Darfur people reject the DPA. Even Minnawi, the main beneficiary of the DPA rated its application at 1%; that is after 6 months of its signing. In other sense, no body takes the DPA serious and that includes the government as well. Given these facts, I must say that it takes a tremendously thick neck to try to rekindle it, whether in the guise of the DDDC or otherwise. But let us see the Chairman’s vision for carrying out the DDDC:

Mr. Mohammad calls for “the participation of all Darfurians” in the DDDC. Plainly speaking, this point is so unrealistic that it smacks of self-deception and day-dreaming. Well over half of Darfur population are now either displaced or refugees outside the Sudan. Two thirds of the population of the state of western Darfur are now residing in Chad. To that, Mr. Mohammad must add the NRF, SLM-Nur, G19 and their affiliate. By all practical terms, the AU has disengaged from these groups and has expelled their representatives from the Ceasefire Commission and the Joint Commission. Moreover, the government classified the NRF as a terrorist organisation, a classification that it declared in a major AU meeting and the AU obliged. How Mr Mohammad is going to square all that with his vision of participation of all in the DDDC is unimaginable.

Mr. Mohammad’s DDDC vision also referred to necessity of “effective participation of the international community”. Again here the impracticality of the vision of DDDC’s Chairman is remarkable. Mr. Mohammad must have followed Khartoum’s debacle with Mr. Jan Pronk, the UN Special Envoy for Sudan. If Sudan cannot deal with the UN Envoy in a civilised diplomatic manner, what chances would DDDC have in securing their cooperation? When Mr Andrew Natsios, the new US Special Envoy to Sudan visited Khartoum for the first time, Mr. Albashir did not even have the courtesy to with meet him.

Furthermore, only a day after Mr Mohammad’s accession to his new portfolio, the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) decided to suspend its operations in Darfur. Citing government obstruction, the aid agency said: “the frequent disruption of our humanitarian work, such as suspension for a sum of 210 days, is forcing us to take this very difficult position”. The NRRC leaves behind the 300,000 whom it has been serving to an unknown fate.

There can be no doubt that the involvement of the international community is crucial for peace, reconstruction and reconciliation in Darfur. Nonetheless and given the legendary and albeit humiliating enmity of Khartoum to the international community which flocked to aid south of Sudan and feed Darfur people, it is hard to see how Mr. Mohammad would even dare to include them in his DDDC vision.

If the above seems bizarre, think about the talk about “Over- passing the events and tragedies of the past”. I simply find this statement nauseating, to say the least. The issue is not past tragedies. Rather, it is the daily killings that have been going on at the very time when the chairman of the DDDC was outlining his vision. In some ways, the view that Albashir has vowed to wipe off 50% of Darfur people before the coming “democratic” elections must be more than rumours. Here is the achievement of the government army and Janjaweed in the past week alone:

The state of west Darfur witnessed Janjaweed/army attacks on IDP villages of Sirba and the village of Umdageeg, November 11. In south Darfur similar attacks targeted the villages of Angabo, Ungadeema, Laboos, Umrami, Mutwarrid, Fadeela, Juma and Twalib. These villages are located within close proximity of the government centre of Diein (11 –13 November).

In north Darfur, the attacks focussed on Madu area where a score of children are gathered and burnt alive in a grass hut. Parents who rushed to help were shot dead (11 November).

As for west Darfur, MP Yahia Bashir witnessed government soldiers leaving Guneina town together with Janjaweed to launch their attacks. He now wants an investigation of the matter, as the area attacked is not a rebel held zone and is firmly under control of the government. If the Chairman of the DDDC knows these facts, the AU has a problem, if not, the AU should be advised to disband and make a fresh start sometime in the future.

The futility of launching the DDDC under the current negative environment in Sudan and Darfur should not lead us to dismiss the DDDC all together. The DDDC can indeed play an important role in boosting ownership of any agreement that can be reached. It can also help in reconciliation and future peaceful co-existence. However, the DDDC must be part and parcel of a peace agreement that is blessed by wide acceptance across Darfur. That is certainly not the case with the present DPA. Our sincere advice to Mr. Mohammad and the AU technical staff is not to proceed with a project that is doomed to failure. Let me end by saying Salam to Abdul and apologise for my occasional harsh words.

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