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Darfur Peace Should Be Renegotiated Not Enhanced

An Open Letter to Ambassador Sam Ibuk, AU Chief Negotiator & Head of AU Committee for the Implementation of the DPA.

20 October 2006

By Dr Abdullahi Osman El-Tom

By Dr. Abdullahi Osman El-Tom

Dear Ambassador Ibuk:

October 18, 2006 — I was flabbergasted to read your statement regarding the unwillingness of the AU to renegotiate the so-called Darfur Peace Agreement (DPA). On the AU launch of the Darfur-Darfur Dialogue Conference, October 12th, you stated: As far as the “African Union is concerned we are not going to reopen the DPA but we are going to see how to enhance it”. Let me explain get straight to the point and over look the semantic difference between “enhancing ” and “renegotiating” the DPA.

Frankly - speaking in my personal capacity as a Darfurian, a Sudanese and as an African - I find your statement shameful to say the least. Assuming that the statement reflects AU views on the matter, I think we Africans should sit back and reflect upon the way our long – awaited organization (AU) is run. As it stands, there will be much doubt if the AU can ever be that institution which was founded to guarantee peace and stability in Africa in the first place.


The so-called DPA has so far costed unnecessary death and destitution for so many in Darfur and Sudan at large. The DPA can be viewed as genuine mistake committed by the AU. In that sense, it is a forgivable error as genuine mistakes are contingent to action. What cannot be justified ethically is the continuation of the AU in upholding an agreement long after its falsity has become apparent to all. Continuation of the AU in burying its head in the sand and its persistent pretence that the DPA can be made to work demonstrate an incomprehensible sense of self-deception among senior AU staff, including your goodself, Ambassador Sam Ibuk. To mortgage the lives of millions of Darfur/Sudan citizens for simple preservation of egos of certain AU individuals is a crime that should not be allowed to prevail. Failure of Africans to rise up and put an end to this tragedy will continue to haunt us for generations to come.

Despite its most shameful and unfortunate aspects, Darfur crisis presented a golden opportunity for the young AU to demonstrate its ability to put an end to western paternalism and stand as a force capable of handling Africa’s formidable challenges. The deployment of AU forces in Darfur in 2004 was an admirable step towards the achievement of the aspirations of the masses of the continent. However, there is much worry that these efforts and opportunity have been squandered by the way the DPA was concluded on the 5th of May 2006 and the behaviour of the AU senior staff since then. This turn of events, I am afraid, has given ample credence to all stereotypes about African corruption, incompetence, lack of integrity and so forth. With some humility on your part, we the non-signatories of the DPA could have told you early in May that the DPA is no good, will lead to nothing but further death and suffering in Darfur and that it is plainly immoral to proceed with it. Unlike us, others, some of whom can credibly claim authorship of the DPA have come to the same conclusion and have gone public with it. They have the honesty and courage to go public with their views. Below are some examples:

Contribution of Mr Jan Pronk, the UN Special Envoy to Sudan, to the DPA is beyond dispute. As an internationally respected diplomat, the failure of his DPA project must have been a nightmare and a set back in his longstanding career. Nonetheless, he has the wisdom to face the truth, swallow his pride and declare courageously that he and others have made a terrible mistake.

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