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## Exterminating Darfur people by evicting their NGO feeders

By Abdullahi Osman El-Tom

March 8, 2009: Minutes after the declaration of the ICC ruling on Al-Bashir, March 4th 09, the Khartoum government ordered 10 International NGOs to leave Darfur. The same order was later served to another three international aid agencies bringing the total to 13. If that was the fate of reputable organisations like Oxfam, Save the Children, the Norwegian Refugee Council and the Nobel prize winning Doctors Without Borders, the fortune of national NGOs was much worse. Two of them who were caught in the confrontation were simply ordered to disband.

It is of course legitimate to see this eviction as a new bargaining card designed by Khartoum to help in invoking Article 16 of the Rome Treaty in the UNSC with a view to aborting the ICC arrest warrant against Al-Bashir, at least for one year. However, this should not disguise the horrific gravity of the situation - effectively withdrawing access to the services of all major humanitarian agencies in Darfur. The beleaguered Darfur people have already been deprived of every other means of survival. For six years, the Sudanese official army, aided by the Janjaweed and other allied militias such as Border Guards have destroyed villages, granaries, farms, animals, water centres - looting whatever was of value. As such, victims have become dependent on NGOs for their sheer survival.

Horrible statistics show the vulnerability of the Darfur people following NGO expulsion in the region. The UN Secretary General declared that this callous action deprived 4.7m of Darfur's inhabitants of aid that is necessary for their bare survival, with Amnesty International lowering that figure to 2.2m. Sudan Tribune, a reputable source of news and analysis on Sudan, estimates that eviction translates roughly into evacuation of 6,500 national and international personnel and an equivalent of 40% of aid workers in Darfur. Oxfam alone has 400 staff of which 25 are international. With the departure of Oxfam, 600,000 would lose their most vital assistance. The departure of Save the Children on the other hand would leave 50,000 children without adequate provisions.

Given the facts outlined above, it is difficult not to conclude that Khartoum's action is nothing but a blatant attempt to exterminate the people of Darfur by dearth of basic sources of security, by hunger and disease. Having destroyed every means of securing food and other necessities, the Khartoum government now drives away the NGOs on which the people of Darfur depend. To borrow an expression from ex-US Envoy, Richard Williamson, Darfur people are left to endure "genocide in slow motion". It is perplexing that the international community does not take current NGO eviction as, plainly speaking, a slow massacre through starvation that can be added to Al-Bashir's deservedly earned list of war crimes.

But there is no limit to Al-Bashir's callousness. Following the issuance of the arrest warrant, he and other top officials declared they would respond to the western ICC 'conspiracy' by development and by turning the Doha Agreement (February 18th, 2009) into a full peace package for the country. It is hard to take Al-Bashir's advisors as serious and/or competent and worthy of their posts. If Al-Bashir wants to fool the world that he is genuinely interested in pushing forward the Doha Agreement, his NGO fiasco indicates otherwise. Overlooking Khartoum's notoriety for breaching agreements that it signs, here is what Article 3 of "the Goodwill and Confidence-building Agreement to Resolve Darfur Conflict" says:

*"3. Agree to take all necessary measures to create conducive environment for reaching a lasting settlement of the conflict, including:*

*(a) Refrain from all kinds of harassment of IDPs.*

*(b) Guarantee the smooth and unobstructed flow of relief assistance to the needy people without any obstacles or constraints."*

The expulsion of NGOs from Darfur therefore constitutes a flagrant breach of the Doha Agreement, which Al-Bashir has pretended to promote and use as a challenge to Darfur international stake holders.

Avid supporters of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement - self included - with their dream of seeing a non-Mugabe style of democratic elections and subsequent transformation of Sudan into a viable inclusive State, have a lot to contemplate on the fate of the discharged NGOs. A close observer of Sudan politics alerted me to the irony that the order of eviction of the said NGOs came from a government Ministry which is currently held by none other than the Sudan People's Liberation Army/Movement (SPLM), the chief partner in the current Government of National Unity (GoNU). In accordance with Sudan's national laws, NGOs have to register with and remain accountable to the Humanitarian Aid Commission (HAC) located in the Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs, headed by SPLM esteemed Minister, Mr Harun Run Lual.

While the miserable fate of Darfur people under Al-Bashir is beyond contest, it is hard and unrealistic to expect progression of the CPA into a genuine and fully fledged elected democracy. To be fair to the SPLM, I must mention with commendation that the Government of Southern Sudan deplored the NGO expulsion order and appealed for restoration of the status quo. Experience has shown that the SPLM has little say in the the GoNU such as in its views on bombing of Darfur civilians. At most, SPLM protests are seen by Khartoum as minor episodes of inconvenience. Al-Bashir is simply incapable of reasoning with anyone, be they his government partners, the international community or Darfur people. That is why Sudan will be better served by Al-Bashir in the Hague and not in Khartoum.

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