

POLITICAL AND SECURITY UPDATE – SOUTH & WEST DARFUR

Executive Summary

Conditions in Darfur (South and West) do not allow for TCC to verify the upcoming elections. The heightened levels of insecurity and violence make many parts of South and West Darfur inaccessible for observers. Many citizens have either being left on the sidelines of the political process (starting with census and registration) or are systematically being deprived of their voices by making it difficult for them to participate in elections. With many actors across the political landscape anticipating and gearing up for violence (during and/or after the vote), a generalized conflict seems imminent, worsening the lot of the ordinary people, compromising TCC's credibility and endangering its personnel on the ground.

Ongoing Conflict and Displacement of Civilians

Many parts of South and West Darfur are experiencing violent conflicts that have uprooted civilians as late as two weeks ago. Intra-Arab tribal fighting in Kass, SLA-Minawi warring on the Berged people, joint SLA-AbdelWahid and JEM fighting against government forces around Silea, government offensives against SLA-AbdelWahid in East Jabal Mara, two helicopter crashes claimed by AbdelWahid and a certain Revolutionary United Front (an obscure Arab militia formerly called "Oppressed Soldiers"), unconfirmed violations of JEM-GoS cessation of hostilities agreement, random acts of violence (small and big) by Chadian rebels spread in southern West Darfur, and many more. These conflicts displaced citizens (in many cases entire villages), creating an enabling environment for vote rigging in place that TCC observers are unable to monitor due to attendant insecurities.

Systematic Disempowerment of Citizens

Besides the shortcomings of the census and registration process that TCC has already addressed, all opposition parties that LTOs have spoken with in West and South Darfur are unforgiving about the partiality of the mapping of electoral constituencies. TCC found equally troubling the unequal ratio of voters to polling centers as blatant instruments of disempowering citizens. South Darfur HEC Chairman assured TCC that all polling centers are designed to accommodate an average of 1,200 voters during the three polling days (with an average of 400 voters a day). Many constituencies, where NCP is suspected to have low popularity, have inadequate number of polling centers to accommodate the registered voters. Examples include:

1. the 13th Tulus constituency has 14,463 registered voters and 10 polling centers (at an average of 3,446 voters per polling center);
2. the 16th Sheiria and Muhajiriya constituency has 46,084 registered voters and 10 polling centers (at an average of 4,608 voters per polling center)

Similarly, while no measures have been taken to accommodate the electoral needs of the displaced persons, especially the recently displaced as in Sheiria, Shataya and Kass,

polling centers for people suspected of being anti-NCP are considered to be too far for those citizens to be able to vote. Examples include:

1. In South Darfur, polling centers of residents of Karamje and surrounding villages have been relocated to places too far for the displaced of those villages to travel to.
2. In West Darfur, residents of Abuley are expected to travel over 50 km to vote in Habila Kanary.

TCC's inability to travel outside Nyala and El-Geneina make it impossible to testify to the fairness of the process or credibility of the outcome.

Extant Recipe for Violence

The diversity of armed power centers, conflicting interests and personalities, and seemingly delineated loyalties are indicators that the planned elections (regardless of the outcome) may launch Darfur into wider and generalized strife. El-Geneina, for example, is home to half dozen armed forces that have clashed before and do not always get along well now.

- 1) All elements of the Sudanese security sector (regular and electoral police, intelligence, army, popular forces...)
- 2) SLA-Abul-Ghaseem (appointed as governor of West Darfur after he broke away from SLA-AbdelWahid and signed agreement with GoS, Abul-Ghaseem's forces were neither demobilized nor integrated into the Sudanese security apparatus and recently killed regular soldiers over minor altercation.
- 3) SLA-Minawi: Although these forces also roam the borders areas of West and South Darfur, their presence in El Geneina is viable enough to allegedly engage in backdoor dealing and wheeling with opposition personalities and political parties.
- 4) Former Janjweed militias who, upon refusing to disarm (if GoS had genuinely tried to do so), were integrated into the government security apparatus as border intelligence.
- 5) Chadian forces (for joint border patrol since the Chadian-Sudanese agreement)
- 6) Chadian opposition forces that are scattered in West Darfur but also go in and out of El-Geneina.
- 7) JEM (and to a limited extent LJM) is believed to be a stone throw away from the city center and any travels north of El-Geneina requires JEM green light or risks its violence.

Moreover, as noted in an earlier communication, political parties in West Darfur seem to have struck a deal with one or the other of the rebels/movements and are determined to block NCP gubernatorial victory. This seems to be particularly the case with DUP (Original) that is bent on preventing the return of one time Governor Jafer AbdelHakeem on an NCP ticket.

Seemingly Inevitable Conflict

Condemning the division of people of Darfur first as Arab versus Africans and then along tribal lines, Mesalit *Sultan* Asa'ad AbdulRahman AbdelHakeem offered to become DUP's candidate for governor when NCP stepped over his older brother's head and forwarded the Fur *Shartai* as its candidate. After repeating several times his certainty of winning, *Sultan* Asa'ad made it clear to TCC that the electoral process has become so tribalized that the victory of one candidate will automatically mean the victory of his tribe over the other tribe which may not accept defeat. All rebels are, however, believed to be united against the return of the *Shartai* to office for historical and political reasons not ethnic.

With each side convinced that the other would cheat and stating its determination to do everything possible to stop "cheating", existing political forces are on a collision course. And they seem to have completed their preparations. On the one hand, state officials and NCP leaders in South and West Darfur agree that government forces are in place to ensure the security of the elections; one only needs to walk or drive around El-Geneina to see that they are true to their word. On the other hand, opposition parties unanimously expect the elections to be attended or immediately followed by violence. To this equation one can add the politically shrewd and military capable Governor Abul-Ghaseem and his SLA faction who had declared that they had nothing to do with the elections. Its intensity and timing are thus unknown, but violent conflagration seems inevitable.

Conclusion

It is for this reason and the reasons outlined above that the upcoming elections in South and West Darfur are unlikely to be free and fair; and if they are, TCC teams are in no position to verify that. Under these givens, saving TCC's credibility and ensuring personnel safety may require declaring South and West Darfur as "no observation zone" after expeditiously withdrawing the deployed teams.