

African Union Panel on Darfur:

Mission to Sudan June 14 – 25, 2009

Process, Outcomes, Observations

SUMMARY

This report details the process, outcomes, and observations from the high-level African Union Panel on Darfur (AUPD) visit to Sudan from June 14 – 25, 2009.

The AUPD is chaired by former South African President Thabo Mbeki and includes former Burundian President Pierre Buyoya, former Nigerian President Abdulsalami Abubakar, Zambian Justice the Honorable Florence Mumba, other African dignitaries, and Sudan experts.

The visit, the third to Sudan by the AUPD, was structured around a series of public hearings involving a wide range of key stakeholders in Darfur and Sudan. The visit and the mechanism of prepared public hearings proved exceptionally successful and led to a number of breakthroughs. It has opened up a new agenda for political engagement and dialogue and is contributing to the widening of the political space in Sudan.

Noting that Darfur is a complex conflict that requires peacemaking from the grassroots level to the national level, this AUPD visit was the most practical exercise in building the foundation for peace that has been undertaken in Darfur in recent times.

Process

1. The public hearings took place as follows:
 - a. June 16, Ain Siro, North Darfur: Sudan Liberation Movement/Abdul Wahid (SLM/AW)
 - b. June 17, Khartoum: Sudan political parties
 - c. June 20, El Fasher, North Darfur: civil society, native administrators, Internally Displaced Persons (IDP), pastoralists
 - d. June 21, Nyala, South Darfur, civil society, native administrators, IDP
 - e. June 22, El Geneina, West Darfur: civil society, native administrators, IDP
 - f. June 23, Zalingei, West Darfur, civil society, native administrators, IDP
 - g. June 25, Khartoum: civil society
2. Attendance at these public hearings ranged from a minimum of 100 to several hundred participants. Most hearings had more than 200 participants.
3. The preparations for the hearings were highly significant. For the three hearings held in the Darfur capital cities, the Darfur–Darfur Dialogue and consultation (DDDC) with the support of the United Nations African–Union Mission in Darfur (UNAMID) Civil Affairs Division (CAD) and other heads of office, mobilized and organized stakeholder participants from every relevant locality. For example:
 - For native administration, chiefs from each sub-district (level of Omda) were invited to select representatives who would attend a preparatory meeting the day before the hearing.
 - For IDP, representatives from each camp in Darfur participated (**Note: nearly every Darfur IDP camp participated, with the major exceptions of Kalma and Kass IDP camps in South Darfur. The AUPD had previously visited Kalma.**)

- For civil society, every registered civil society organization was invited to participate.

4. DDDC and CAD staff travelled widely across Darfur in the weeks preceding the hearings to meet with participants and explain the process. UNAMID administration assisted in efficiently organizing transportation for attendance from all of the identified localities to the Darfur capital cities, resulting in the movement of hundreds of stakeholder representatives.

5. With guidance and facilitation from DDDC and CAD staff, participants, according to the stakeholder group they represented, conducted preparatory meetings using a questionnaire to guide their thinking and structure their recommendations around four issues:

- a. Peace
- b. Reconciliation and healing
- c. Justice and accountability
- d. The role of Darfur in Sudan's national political life.

The questionnaire proved to be an extremely useful mechanism for structuring discussion and helped convince participants of the added value of the exercise.

Significance and Outcomes of Hearings

6. Each of the AUPD hearings had special significance, in terms of widening participation, exploring substantive issues, building confidence, and setting an agenda for steps towards peace, reconciliation, justice and political advancement in Darfur. What follows is illustrative rather than exhaustive observations. A comprehensive report that could form the basis for a full strategy for peacemaking and reconciliation in Darfur is the task of the AUPD and will follow.

7. In Ain Siro, North Darfur, an area controlled by SLM/AW, participants were drawn from all sectors of the community, who walked on foot to the meeting site. A preparatory session was held the day before to formulate their thoughts and answers to the questionnaire. The session held for the assembled community representatives, included speakers representing youth, women, the educational sector, native administration, and the political leadership.

8. The Ain Siro hearing was the first occasion where the AUPD had spent a full day in structured discussions on substantive issues with community representatives in a movement-held area. This provided the AUPD with a clear picture of the priorities of the community and its leaders and their major concerns. It greatly assisted mutual understanding and confidence between the AUPD and the community and the SLM/AW leadership. All these benefits accrued to UNAMID and DDDC as well as the AUPD. Practical results are already forthcoming. One of the Ain Siro community's clear demands was for assistance to pay the salaries of teachers in the school, and the AUPD has already set in motion a process intended to unlock resources for services in movement-held areas and ensure their effective delivery.

9. The Khartoum hearing for Sudan political parties was a breakthrough in that 14 parties attended, more than for any other initiative in recent Sudanese history, including the two parties that had boycotted the Sudanese People Initiative (SPI), the Communist Party and the Popular Congress Party (PCP). The parties engaged seriously with regard to the questionnaire themes. This was the first all-inclusive public discussion of key issues around Darfur and how

they relate to Sudan, including the process of democratization. The hearing itself witnessed small but important steps, including the evolution of the position of the PCP, the attendance of the leader of the Umma Party and the proposals he put forward, and the inclusiveness of the dialogue. Essential issues such as the relationship between a Darfur peace process and the national elections were discussed, with differences aired and debated. Noting that the Darfur peace process takes place in the context of the democratization of Sudan and especially the scheduled general election of February 2010 and the subsequent establishment of a new Government of National Unity, the involvement of political parties in the search for peace is essential. This was the first involvement of the national political parties in a collective discussion with the UN or AU on this topic.

10. The political parties meeting confirmed what has been increasingly evident to UNAMID for some time, namely that Darfur has at last become a focus for the Sudanese political parties. This is an encouraging step and indicates that the Sudanese political elites are well prepared for an inclusive forum and can hammer out a political agreement for Darfur.

11. More than 125 participants attended the Khartoum civil society meeting. Participants, which included lawyers, also presented well-developed proposals. They spoke openly and frankly and expressed diverse points of view on controversial issues. Many of them had been frustrated by the cancellation of the Mo Ibrahim Foundation civil society meeting on Darfur scheduled for May in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, and came to the session with the agendas and presentations they had prepared in advance of that meeting. The session was extensive, wide ranging, and substantive with well-thought out positions on all four issues presented. It was also significant in that Sudan lacks a national civil society forum, and this was the first occasion in some twenty years at which such a wide range of national civil society organizations had come together to discuss any topic. Noting that it is widely recognized that civil society organizations are key stakeholders in any Darfur peace process, as well as the national democratic transformation, this was an essential exercise in building peace.

12. The hearings in Darfur were significant in the range of participants and the structured and substantive nature of the discussions and proposals. All the issues were on the table. The hearings themselves, simply because they were held, allowed the participants to become part of a process—which was their central demand. The political skill of the three former presidents on the AUPD was also on display, as they reassured all participants that an inclusive process was necessary, and that the individual hearings were only part of a longer process, which would continue when the AUPD returned with its draft recommendations. The entire exercise was consolidating the social and community infrastructure of peace building.

13. The hearing with pastoralists held in El Fasher involved representatives from every North Darfur pastoralist community, the great majority of them Arabs. Overwhelmingly they had not had the opportunity to interact with the international community in such a structured and substantive way prior to this. The Darfur Arabs have consistently demanded that their voice be heard and that they be represented in their own right in any future peace process. The engagement with the Arabs in this way was an important step towards seeking resolution of numerous local problems in Darfur as well as an essential prerequisite for an overall political solution. The AUPD has made it clear that the Arabs are critical to any Darfur peace process, and this meeting was an essential step towards that goal.

14. The Nyala hearings were significant in the breadth and inclusiveness of the native administration leaders represented. Over 300 came together from every part of South Darfur, the first time this has ever happened under international auspices. The conclusions and proposals from the group were, as the AUPD continually experienced, comprehensive. Differences as well as consensus emerged, particularly over the issue of elections. Opinions were divided as to whether elections should proceed before an overall peace was achieved in Darfur. Bringing the issue out into the open in this way was extremely constructive.

15. The El Geneina hearings were notable for the breadth of representation, especially that of civil society and IDP. This was the first occasion on which such a wide group of stakeholders from these groups had come together. Some of the key issues that were raised included the role and representation of women, the relative responsibilities of the Government of Sudan and armed movements for displacement, and the occupation of vacated land by new settlers. A specific proposal was made regarding creating a neutral and independent investigatory mechanism to examine the question of the settlement of land by newcomers. This promises to be an important contribution to the peace process and is one that can begin immediately.

16. The Zalingei hearings were notable because of the participation of IDP camp leaders who have generally been militant and unwilling to engage in any peace process. The IDP delegates spoke with complete frankness, advocating their radical positions including international trusteeship for Darfur, the right of self-determination, and the handing over of the President to the ICC as a prelude to any political negotiations. The fact that these leaders were ready to present to the AUPD and discuss their issues was itself significant. Their leading demands included security inside and around camps and in areas of their former residence. Arising from this and other sessions with IDP came a proposal from President Mbeki for UNAMID and the Government of Sudan to immediately and in practical ways begin to improve security in Darfur.

17. The Government of Sudan was notable by its absence from most of the hearings. The Government of Sudan honored a request by the AUPD to stand back and allow the hearings and open discussion to proceed. Individuals aligned with the Government of Sudan were present in some of the hearings, but in others, such as in Ain Siro and with IDP in Zalingei, they were not. In the hearings, especially the Khartoum hearing, the presence of Government of Sudan-aligned individuals did not deter individuals from speaking extremely frankly. The Government of Sudan's readiness to let such free discussion under AU auspices is an encouraging sign.

18. The consensus from the hearings included the following points:

- a. Peace negotiations require the involvement of all stakeholders in the Darfur crisis.
- b. Given the right facilitation, Darfurians can resolve many of their problems at a local level.
- c. There are immediate and practical things that parties to the Darfur conflict can do to ameliorate the situation in Darfur that do not require new peace agreements, negotiations, written agreements, outside intervention, or necessitate creating new mechanisms.
- d. The peace process in Darfur is closely tied in with the national political process, including in particular the elections and the Southern referendum.

- e. Achieving peace in Darfur requires far more than signing an agreement between warring parties and must also include establishing social coexistence and resolving conflicts at a local level.

Observations

19. The public hearings of the last two weeks have demonstrated the capability of UNAMID, each of its sections acting in coordination towards a common goal, to deliver an important political breakthrough. The public hearings have been an unprecedented exercise in consultation and have led to the consolidation of constituencies for peace, articulated the clear agenda items and processes necessary to achieve peace, reconciliation, justice and progress towards national democratic transformation. This exercise was long overdue and it is fortunate that the AUPD provided the leadership needed to set it in motion.

20. The public hearings have created momentum and expectations. The AUPD has been careful to repeatedly insist that its recommendations can only be implemented by the Sudanese themselves and will not be a deus ex machina solution. Much rests on the next stage of the AUPD's deliberations and its recommendations, and the manner in which it engages with the stakeholders.

21. The AUPD hearings have put the Darfur policy emphasis back where it belongs, which is on politics. Without such constructive political engagement, political leaders retreat to rhetoric that takes over from the practical search for solutions. The public hearings have demonstrated that alternatives are possible, that there is a powerful social consensus in support of peace and reconciliation, and that if mobilized in an inclusive manner oriented towards workable solutions, Darfurians and Sudanese can take the lead in finding their own solutions.

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