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Human rights situations that require the Council's attention

Written statement* submitted by the Association for World Education, a non-governmental organization on the roster

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[7 September 2010]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

The gathering clouds of war - The UN needs to be firm with Sudan: violent conflict is not an option

1. Despite an historic peace agreement between northern and southern Sudan five years ago in 2005, the threat of renewed civil war looms closer by the day. Any resumption of hostilities would be disastrous for a country that has suffered from years of bloodshed and unfathomable destruction. But the United Nations, the United States, other States, and non-governmental organizations are, as yet, failing to take the vital steps needed to avert a new war, and time is running out.

2. More than 2 million people died, and 5 million were driven from their homes, in a north-south war that dragged on from 1983 to 2003. The linchpin of the peace agreement is a referendum, scheduled for this coming January, in which the people of southern Sudan will have the options including that of secession. But the brutal Government of Sudan that prolonged that war with the south — the same Government that has waged a genocidal campaign against the people of Darfur — remains in power in the capital, Khartoum. This Government appears increasingly determined to abrogate the peace deal by suspending the referendum.

3. The Khartoum Government, led by President Omar al-Bashir, secured a veneer of legitimacy by winning easily in April elections widely viewed as a travesty. International observers — including ones from the United States—were well aware of the extent of fraud and manipulation, but could bring themselves to say only that the elections “did not meet international standards.” US special envoy Scott Gration disingenuously declared that the elections would be “as free and fair as possible.”

4. These tepid judgments from the international community signal to Khartoum that it will not be held accountable under the terms of the 2005 agreement, which demanded credible national elections. Such accommodation complicates rather than facilitates efforts to ensure the integrity of the referendum backed by the United Nations. And that referendum is the only thing that can forestall renewed war.

5. The Government in Khartoum is calculating — right now — the costs of delaying, aborting, or militarily preempting the referendum it agreed to in 2005. The motive is clear: Sudan exports approximately 500,000 barrels of crude oil per day, but the vast majority of oil reserves lie in the south. Important infrastructure — including the origin of a key oil pipeline that runs 900 miles northeast to Port Sudan — lies along the disputed border between the north and south. Under the peace deal, the south gets half the revenue from oil extracted in the south; Khartoum gets the remainder, plus all of the oil revenues from what it declares to be the north. Khartoum may lose this favorable arrangement if the south votes for secession — which it overwhelmingly may. Unless oil wealth-sharing and boundary determinations are fairly negotiated before the voting, war is likely.

6. If it resumes, southern civilians will be caught in the middle. But war will not be confined to the south: Many areas in the north will join the fighting. Darfur, already witnessing a sharp increase in violence, is particularly likely to explode. In turn, Khartoum will likely expel all humanitarian organizations, cutting the lifeline for some 4.7 million needy Darfuris. The UN/African Union peacekeeping force in Darfur will also likely be expelled, leaving 2.7 million internally displaced persons defenseless. What can prevent a resumption of war? How can the international community change Khartoum’s calculations? How can the referendum be supported?

7. First, the United Nations needs to train and brief a large number of independent election observers. Such election observers need to be deployed during the run-up to the referendum. The abuses during the April elections came less during the polling day than

during the campaign itself and during the earlier census. Minority party candidates both in North and South Sudan were threatened by members of the dominant parties. A fair referendum means that the options can be presented clearly and discussed openly. It is not just a matter of access to a polling booth. Organizations with election-monitoring experience, such as the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) should be invited to contribute.

8. All countries with a vital stake in peace and justice in the Sudan area need to be consulted so as to provide support for the referendum and to discuss the possible outcomes well in advance – and the United Nations needs to have contingency planning in case violence occurs over the results of the referendum.

9. The Human Rights Council should authorize the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights to have staff present during the preparation for the referendum – as well as during the referendum – to see that basic human rights such as freedom of assembly, freedom of expression and other human rights necessary for an open referendum are respected.

10. The Association for World Education calls on the HRC to renew the mandate of the Independent Expert on the situation of human rights in the Sudan, requesting him to update his detailed Reports, submitted to the 14th session: A/HRC/14/41 and A/HRC/14/41/Add.1.

Note

The background on the preparations for the referendum are – with the author's permission – taken from an article by Professor Eric Reeves (Smith College, Northampton, MA), published in The Boston Globe on 5 September 2010 (ereeves@smith.edu/www.sudanreeves.org)
http://www.boston.com/bostonglobe/editorial_opinion/oped/articles/2010/09/05/the_gathering_clouds_of_war/
