

ERA Conference: Darfur and its Impact on Sudan and the Region

Story Summary of Panel 4: In Search of Solutions – Prospects for Peace and Economic Development in Darfur

Dr. Bakri Osman Saeed

Dr Saeed is a member of the ruling National Congress Party, the NCP, and also the President of the Sudan National University. He is a medical doctor, having obtained two doctorates from the U.K. and served a fellowship at the Royal College of Pathology. Prior to returning to Sudan last year, Saeed lived in Britain for 22 years.

Saeed said he was not a senior member of the NCP: “Maybe by age, but I don’t occupy a senior position in the (party) hierarchy.” But he added: “I do have access to the (party and government) leadership...”

“I have relation with the Darfur problem at different levels. I work as an advisor to the University for Peace at the United Nations. I have been asked to organize a symposium on environmental degradation as a cause of conflict in Darfur, which I did in 2004.... Subsequently I contributed to a conference on Chinese – Sudanese relations, with specific emphasis on the problem of Darfur.”

Saeed said he’d also attended a number of government meetings on Darfur, which he branded a “very complex problem” and that it remained essential to analyze the region’s history in trying to achieve solutions.

“This is really not a problem of a government versus rebels, or a government which has gone mad, sending Antonovs to bomb villages.... That will suit the minds of some politicians who obviously have an interest in bringing the government down. But here we are more interesting in solving a problem, a real humanitarian catastrophe.”

He suggested that a lot of unrealistic demands were being made by the international community on the parties involved in the conflict, especially the Khartoum government.

“Do we really believe that the government can stop tomorrow what is happening in Darfur? If you read most of the scholars, they will say no; the problem is now beyond the capability of the government.”

Saeed said the current international focus on the deployment of thousands of peacekeeping troops into the region, was misguided.

“.... The American army with 150,000 soldiers and spending billions of dollars (still) cannot control the insurgency in Iraq, which happens to be the size of Darfur.”

He stated that the “main difference” between Darfur and Iraq was that the Sudanese area was a “lot less developed” and there were many parts of Darfur where the best means of transport were camels and horses.

People were asking “too much” of the government to simply march into Darfur and end the conflict there, said Saeed. He commented that it was a fallacy that Khartoum was not concerned with improving the situation in Darfur, and said the opposite was true: “This government has never faced any problem which

threatened its existence, like Darfur. Even the problem in the south does not come near this category because this (southern problem) has been going on for many years without having this (kind of) impact.”

Saeed believed in a “comprehensive approach” towards solving the crisis. He said there were “so many players now. It’s not just the government and the rebels. There are neighboring countries, there are the activist groups, there is the Western world, and so on. All of these parties have to be involved because they all have different interests.”

Many in the international community, Saeed said, were constantly emphasizing that the ending of the Darfur conflict and the humanitarian disaster there was a priority. But he questioned whether this was indeed the case. He was not convinced that certain countries and groups were “really interested in having a peace deal signed” between the government and the rebels.

Saeed remained more convinced that certain players in the situation, in their efforts around Darfur, were motivated more by their wish for “regime change and bringing the (Khartoum) government down” in Sudan than by anything else.

He added that he’d heard a senior US official say that Washington was actually opposed to the Comprehensive Peace Agreement between Khartoum and the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement “because it was going to prolong the life of the al-Bashir regime.”

Saeed said his fellow panel member at the conference, human rights activist John Prendergast, as a former member of the administration of President Bill Clinton, had been part of a government that had a “stated policy of arming the anti-government rebels and the neighboring countries to bring the Sudanese government down.”

He suggested that activists such as Prendergast were actively “encouraging” the rebels in Darfur, and advising them to constantly “lift the ceiling of their demands all the time” and hold out in Darfur “until a NATO-type intervention comes and delivers them another Kosovo.”

Saeed said his “colleagues and friends in the government” had repeatedly told him that the activists and certain countries were always accusing Khartoum of various crimes it was innocent of, “because their final objective is to change the Islamist regime in Sudan.”

(The recent action by the prosecutor for the International Criminal Court, asking the ICC to charge al-Bashir with various crimes related to the atrocities in Darfur, was viewed in the same light by some in the government, Saeed later added).

He said the situation in Darfur had improved but was “still bad. There were no major offensives since probably the beginning of 2005, but there is still significant failure in achieving security (such as the recent attack on AU-UN peacekeepers that killed seven of them and seriously wounded others), humanitarian aid is being bombarded by all sides.”

Saeed emphasized that the Sudan government had “immediately” accepted UN Resolution 1769, which provided for peacekeepers in Darfur, but the deployment of the UNAMID troops was “hampered now by logistical problems and by many parties not honoring the pledges they made” to support such peacekeeping efforts.

“Security hopefully will improve with a lot of measures.... Humanitarian relief will not improve unless security on the ground improves. They go hand in hand.”

But Saeed again took issue with those in the international community who said it was the responsibility of Khartoum to provide security for its citizens, but then “next minute” these very same groups were calling for the government and its troops to stay out of Darfur, to “create no-go zones for the government” and for the establishment of a “no fly zone” that would prohibit government aircraft from flying over Darfur. “Even the UN Security Council produces resolutions (that are) impeding the ability of the government to actually maintain security.... You cannot hold the government responsible for something, and then tie the government’s hands.”

Saeed also blamed “banditry activity” for the situation in Darfur, and said that this was going to be “very difficult to control.”

He returned to his point that any political solution to the crisis should be “comprehensive.... This could be led by envoys under the UN - AU auspices. These envoys could have the authority to set the criteria for selection of delegates. They could set the terms of negotiations.... And probably the people who view Darfur as a battleground with the regime in Khartoum will probably come to their senses and see (the) saving the lives of people in Darfur as the most important aspect.”

Saeed maintained that the political solution would have to be “within the context of the CPA, because the CPA was not just a north – south agreement. It was a framework for solving the problems in the country. And for the first time, in 50 years since independence, the people of Sudan sat down and discussed issues which were never discussed before, about the relationship between the center and periphery, about distribution of wealth, distribution of power, and all that.”

The NCP member, though, added that he did not understand what Prendergast and others meant when they talked about a “comprehensive, all-Sudan policy” being needed to solve the Darfur situation.

“Is it something outside the CPA? What is it? Is it the old regime change thing? Is it something different? We need to know the details, before we can subscribe to this proposition.”

Saeed said that the elections in 2009 were going to “come up with new realities” that would impact on Darfur: “The most important of these realities is that the people who are going to end up representing Darfur in parliament are most likely the tribal leaders and not the rebel leaders. So how is that reality affecting the interim arrangement we are putting into place now? How is this solution proposed for Darfur related to the democratization of the country embedded in the CPA? That’s a very important issue, because we all hope that the provisions of the CPA are going to provide us with the best opportunity we have since independence for creating a sustainable democracy. Things have to be viewed through that window. There was no mention about this in all the deliberations.”

Turning to China’s role as regards Darfur, he again criticized “western governments” and “activist groups” for not being interested in a “positive role” for the Far Eastern giant: “They’re only interested in driving China out of Sudan, and harming the Sudanese government. Everything they are doing is trying to provoke China.”

He condemned a letter by members of the US Congress earlier this year to China’s President Hu Jintao. The letter called on him to end Beijing’s economic, military and diplomatic support for Khartoum, and referred to China as being the government of Sudan’s “chief protector and apologist” at the UN and on the international stage. The letter also urged China to support further sanctions against Khartoum.

Saeed suggested the letter had deeply insulted Hu, and had “come across as dictating a foreign policy” to China: “It does not even ask the Chinese government to adopt all the American policies towards the Sudanese government, it goes even beyond that. It is asking the Chinese government to put pressure on the

Sudanese government to (take certain measures), and that includes withdrawing government troops from Darfur. Would you believe that? Were these people really serious, that they want China to help them? That never looked to me like a genuine attempt to involve the Chinese government in solving the problems of Sudan.”

Referring to the “rebel movements” in Darfur, Saeed said he knew some of their leaders, as he’d attended university with them.

“We were part of the Islamic movement as university students in Sudan, and they are very, very fine people.”

He said he had “no doubt” that when he’d known the rebel leaders, they had been “genuine” in their quest for a “better share of the wealth and power for their people.” But he said that a “lot of water has passed under the bridge” since those early days, and that he was now convinced that the men he’d once known were currently in the employ of “external forces.”

“Obviously they wouldn’t have been able to mount these operations (against the government) without very strong financial, logistical and political support.”

He warned that the rebels were in the future going to “pay a price” for “selling themselves” to these external forces: “They have to be very careful that they (don’t) pay a price of blood of their own people (for accepting support from) activist groups and Western government who have different agenda...”

Saeed said he was familiar with the leadership of the Joint Equality Movement rebels, including one of the Jem leaders, Khalil Ibrahim. He said he seriously questioned some of Jem’s recent actions, including its attack in May on government forces at Omdurman, near Khartoum.

“After the invasion of Omdurman I asked myself: Would these people really commit such a suicidal act, if they controlled their destiny? Did Jem really benefit from invading Omdurman, and getting their leadership killed and hundreds of their fighters rounded (up and imprisoned)? And all their weapons confiscated, in a battle which lasted two hours? One army officer in Khartoum told me: It didn’t last two hours; it lasted ten minutes.... It was just suicidal.”

Saeed said the first government rocket to hit the Jem convoy of vehicles approaching Omdurman was actually the “end of the battle” and he questioned why the rebels were prepared to take on Khartoum when they didn’t have any chance of success.

He commented that a number of parties had actually benefited in various ways from Jem’s attack on Omdurman, including the “Chadian regime” and the activists and western governments “who are intent on harming the Sudanese government.... Ironically, even the Sudanese government benefited from that, because they projected themselves as the saviors of people from these foreign invaders.”

Nevertheless, he said he was pleased at the apparent commitments by Jem leaders at the conference for a “united Sudan” and for a “negotiated peaceful solution. This is the direction in which we should all go for. This is what will settle the Darfur problem.”

In response to questions from the floor, Saeed said China’s role with regard to solving the problem of Darfur should be “entwined with the role of the western governments, the USA in particular, because we will be naïve to assume that the American Congressmen will (just) sit there and see China getting the credit of solving the Darfur problem.”

He stated that China could play an important role in raising the “level of trust between the government and the other parties. China is in a (position) to provide a sort of guarantee – if they are convinced they want to

play that role – that the objective here is to achieve a negotiated settlement for Darfur and nothing else. Because the government (of Sudan) doesn't believe that, and doesn't believe that many of the American Congressmen and interest groups in America.... that that's their only objective....”

Saeed was also convinced that China could also provide troops for peacekeeping in Darfur.

He repeated that “a lot” was being done, “especially by US government and legislative councils and some activists” aimed at “driving China out of Sudan and not involving China in a constructive engagement to solve the problem of Darfur.”

With regard to the difficulties in deploying UNAMID peacekeepers in Darfur, Saeed said he didn't understand what was actually expected of Khartoum: “Is the government of Sudan supposed to provide helicopters to UNAMID? Is the government of Sudan (to supply) all these logistics (to UNAMID)? It's mostly the European countries who pledged to support UNAMID who are (now) not doing that.”

He reiterated that the scale of the Darfur situation had been exaggerated: “There are little things happening here and there and they are always overblown because whatever is related to Darfur now has a tendency for being amplified. If a junior bureaucrat sitting in Port Sudan argued about custom duty on a box coming to UNAMID, that would appear in a publication of one of these (activist) groups as (evidence that) the Sudanese government is obstructing.... UNAMID....”

The “main obstacle” to deployment of additional peacekeepers in Darfur, he once again stressed, was that countries that had agreed to sponsor UNAMID were not doing so.

Referring to allegations that the government continued to support the janjaweed militia in Darfur, Saeed said the Sudan government was not associated with the janjaweed, which was an independent militia: “I don't think there was an intention of arming the Arabs versus the non-Arabs or anything like that. But most of the so-called Arabs in Darfur are nomads, and they have a warrior culture. They are more likely to be involved in these formations.”

He said groups such as the janjaweed were formed from people in Darfur who “didn't have land, they didn't come from settled communities, so it suited them to get involved in these formations and get paid.... You can call them mercenaries, or whatever.”

But it was not the government that was paying these militias, he emphasized.

Referring again to the 2009 elections, Saeed said the polls were set to “legitimize” the NCP and the Sudan government, because the ruling party was sure to win. For this reason, Khartoum's opponents he said were involved in various “maneuvers” that were “probably aimed at delaying the elections....”

He maintained that the elections should also take place in Darfur, despite the humanitarian crisis there. He conceded, though, that this would be complex, especially as a result of all the different groups with an interest in Darfur, such as rebel leaders and traditional leaders. He suggested that maybe “neutral technocrats” could represent Darfur in the polls, or joint tribal and rebel leaders.

In response to Saeed's assertion that the government couldn't stop what was happening in Darfur, Prendergast referred to the situation in the late 1990s when the pro-government Murulaheen militia was active in Sudan's Bahr el-Gazal region, enslaving black Sudanese, raping and killing, in a scenario that was very similar to what was presently happening in Darfur. Prendergast said when Khartoum “finally did suspend and stop its assistance to the militias that were sowing chaos in northern Bahr el-Gazal.... we saw a fairly rapid change in northern Bahr el-Gazal. I'm not saying that that will happen in Darfur; I am saying

though that a major part of the problem in Darfur is the continuation of a policy that supports multi-level conflict.”

Gerard Prunier also responded to Saeed’s assertion that the NCP was set to win the elections. Prunier agreed that the NCP had a very good chance of achieving this: “Such regimes are so good at winning.... I mean these guys are good, so they might win the election.”

Warwick Davies-Webb

Warwick Davies-Webb is Research Director at Executive Research Associates. He has an MA in International Relations from the University of Witwatersrand in South Africa, and has been researching events in Africa since the mid-1980s. One of his areas of focus is assessing the interventions of the international community in Africa, and the implications these have on private sector investment opportunities on the continent.

Davies-Webb said sanctions had become the “holy cow of US foreign policy towards Sudan” from both the Democratic and Republican perspectives: “If we are serious about what’s happening with regard to economic development in Darfur, we need to reassess sanctions in terms of what role (they’re) going to play in making Darfur a successful area of economic development once the conflict’s ended. And in doing that, one has to look back in terms of lessons learned as to what has happened with implementation of sanctions thus far on Sudan.”

He contended that the institution of sanctions was a “poor policy tool with regards to implementing change in Sudan - whether it’s in terms of regime change, or trying to push the political process in Sudan forward.”

By way of explanation, Davies-Webb said US sanctions had “really had minimal impact on Khartoum.... It hasn’t affected the fundamental structures of the government that’s in place, and its ability to raise funds and do what it has to do to maintain power. But perhaps more importantly is the impact that sanctions have had on those very people it had the least intention to affect, and that’s.... south Sudan.... After several years of sanctions there are some problems emerging with regard to the impact sanctions have had on the ground in that country.”

He explained that US lawmakers and others in Washington concerned with events in Sudan were beginning to realize that sanctions on Sudan had resulted in several “unintended consequences.”

Despite the sanctions, said Davies-Webb, the Sudanese economy – including in the “non-oil sector” – was continuing to grow: “The latest IMF (International Monetary Fund) assessments of that country’s economic growth rate is roughly ten to 12 per cent per annum.”

He added that the problem with the US sanctions policy at this stage was that it did not have the “buy-in necessary from its allies, from members of the UN Security Council, to make sanctions effective. Until they have that sort of buy-in, they’re not going to be successful in making a major impact on what’s happening in Sudan today.”

Perhaps more disconcerting, he stated, was the fact that “attempts to curb oil exports from Sudan are reducing oil export – or threatening to reduce – oil export revenues heading to the south. And this is the contradiction we find in US sanctions policy at the moment: In trying to halt the flow of US oil revenues into Sudan, you are affecting those revenues that are going into south Sudan.”

Davies-Webb said that while north Sudan had oil infrastructure in place and companies active there, new investment in south Sudan was “minimal” in the energy sector. In fact, certain companies were withdrawing from the south, because they were not prepared to risk violating US sanctions.

International companies were very concerned with the US’s Darfur Accountability Act, which allowed state divestment in any company doing business in Sudan.

“The question we need to ask is, what objectives are trying to be achieved by this?”

He added that another major problem in south Sudan were the costs there that were “simply too prohibitive, especially with regards to companies trying to do business there, the legislation and red tape involved around getting special permission from the Office of Foreign Asset Control in the (US) Treasury, is simply too much of a hassle to try and work through, especially for small companies.”

Davies-Webb said US companies going into south Sudan were hampered there by “antiquated banking systems, they don’t have the opportunity to plug into US institutions covering their insurance and other export promotional finances.... Because those entities cannot operate in that country in terms of current legislation.”

He added: “The major problem that we look at in trying to talk about development in the south is that in terms of global flows of capital in the world, Africa unfortunately is at the bottom of the food chain. And when you take a look at Africa, Sudan is at the bottom of that food chain, along with perhaps Somalia and one or two other places.”

Because of this, said Davies-Webb, there was no significant economic development taking place in the south. If you go to Khartoum, it’s increasingly looking like one of the Gulf cities in terms of developments that are taking place there. Juba remains locked in the Stone Age.”

He was convinced that this lack of development in the south was “encouraging secessionist tendencies” there as southerners had yet to see significant economic dividends as a result of the 2005 peace deal: “As a result of that we know for a fact that a senior GOSS (government of southern Sudan) delegation visited Washington in October last year to speak to the US government about what sanctions was doing to the south, pleading for some sort of a respite and financial assistance. And not surprisingly the US administration turned to them and said: ‘Well gentlemen where have you been these last few months when Senate Resolution 2271 was being discussed in Congress?’ And it’s a clear classic case of them trying to have their cake and eat it.”

The southern authorities, Davies-Webb maintained, had been victims of “bad advice. GOSS made a cardinal blunder in believing that sanctions would be a problem for Khartoum and not for Juba. And that was linked to the proponents of sanctions suggesting that you could carve up Sudan in terms of how sanctions impact that country. Frankly, you can’t talk about unity on the one hand, and then start talking about the Balkanization of the country on the other in terms of assisting the south’s development.”

He said that US legislation in a sense tended “to penalize both US and non-US companies” that were trying to establish businesses in the south.

According to Davies-Webb, the origins of the problem lay in the fact that Sudan’s “key oil blocs.... are actually sitting in south Sudan.” US legislators, he said, had been ignorant of this at the time they were discussing the Darfur Accountability Act, and they were “horrified” when informed that this was the case.

“Looking at Darfur, it has implications for that region as well, because those oil blocs are extending into south Darfur. And those companies that own those oil blocs, such as the China National Petroleum Corporation and Sudapet, are those very same companies that are the subject of sanctions by the US; they’re sitting in north Sudan as well.”

In terms of current US sanctions legislation, said Davies-Webb, if there was sufficient oil to establish an oil pipeline from the south to Port Sudan, such a move would be in violation of US sanctions, “because you have to cross into north Sudan, you’ve got to use the infrastructure, you’ve got to deal with Sudanese state structures to do that.”

The southern Sudanese were also bound by the CPA in terms of development in their oil sector, he added.

“The problem for southern Sudan is that in terms of the current oil concessions the CPA doesn’t allow them to revoke those oil concessions. One example of this was the White Nile issue. Up until recently there was a legal battle between White Nile and Total over the control of Bloc 5 C in south Sudan, and the legal position was that Total SA would remain as the shareholders of that bloc, as per the CPA agreement. That was despite White Nile coming in under the wing of the southern government.”

Davies-Webb quipped: “Juba has a problem in terms of controlling the development and production of its oil fields as things stand now.”

He said there was a clear need, as far as Darfur was concerned, for the US’s sanctions policy pertaining to Sudan to be reassessed, if people were serious in developing Sudan.

“The concerns for Darfur in terms of political progress there need to be balanced by a more realistic assessment on the needs and concerns facing south Sudan.... We need to look at a process where, if we’re talking about a holistic approach to resolving the conflict there, that progress in both Darfur and the CPA should be linked to the calibrated lifting of sanctions. So very simply, the economic problems faced by GOSS shouldn’t be repeated in Darfur.”

Darfur, he said, was in need of “massive private investment. Everyone here would agree that foreign aid is essential for Darfur’s development. My argument is let the private sector go in, let them do the job, doesn’t matter which country they’re coming from, if we’re serious about development.”

Davies-Webb expressed the need for Darfur to engage US state legislators, “who are busy passing sanctions as state level, to reassess and to try and understand the implications that may have on development in Sudan.”

Answering a question from the floor about China, Davies-Webb said the country could and would become “more pragmatic on the Sudanese issue. And that’s simply by the virtue of the changing balance of power in Sudan. China’s first and foremost in Sudan because there are resources in that country that China needs. In a sense, (Sudan) is the basis of its Africa policy, in many instances.”

He added that China got “quite a fright” when the CPA was signed “because they actually took a look at the map of the oil concessions, and they suddenly realized that half their oil blocs were actually in south Sudan. So the CPA was a shift in balance in terms of China’s priorities in that country. And shortly after the CPA was signed, (SPLM leader and Sudan’s First Vice-President) Salva Kiir actually headed a delegation to China to discuss precisely the issue of oil.”

Davies-Webb said his view was that China was “expedient. They will go where they think the power is. They are already in a number of discussions with south Sudan on a whole range of economic development

projects, including oil infrastructure and various other issues. In fact, if Darfur discovered oil tomorrow, they'd be talking to the Darfurians. They'd probably be one of their best allies.”

Omer Ismail

Omer Ismail is the Enough! Project's policy advisor, and also the founder of Darfur Peace and Development, an NGO. He's also had extensive experience in assisting the UN and other agencies in Darfur.

Ismail said that as a Darfurian, he felt “very stressed” about some of the comments made at the conference: “Basically I'm here to talk about the possibilities of a peace process that's going to end the misery of the people of Darfur and Sudan in general.... What I hear is that there is no possibility for that and I am not ready yet to throw the towel (in) so I'm going to take a different route and I beg to differ from some prominent people....”

He conceded that there were many disparate militia and rebel groups in Darfur, and that the region didn't yet have a leader in the mould of (deceased SPLM chief) John Garang to show them the way forward, but there was still hope, he maintained.

“There are people who are sitting among us in this room who carried arms against each other and fought viciously against the SPLM, or the SPLM fought against them. They went out of the SPLM; they went to the government of Sudan.... They stayed for years and years (in Khartoum); they came back and joined the SPLM. That is the nature of the insurgency. That is the nature of war. That did not stop the SPLM from reaching an agreement on January 9, 2005. In fact the CPA itself carries some provisions that prove that this peace agreement was reached with that separation and with that division in mind, and with it as a reality. Because look at the 14 per cent that is allocated to the other parties in the south.”

He said that these “other parties” referred to in the CPA were “militias” that “fought the SPLM. In the provisions of the CPA, the militia was given the choice at a certain date after the separation of the arms either to join the SPLA, or to join the Sudanese Armed Forces. And until today, there are renegade militias who (have) not joined either. Nonetheless, the CPA was (signed) and the CPA was working.”

He said his point was that the fact that there were so many different groups fighting in Darfur should not prevent the government of Sudan from seeking peace.

Yet Ismail said many in the international community and in Sudan itself were giving up, and saying a solution was impossible as there were now too many different groups to negotiate with. But the CPA proved that this was possible, he stressed.

Ismail said the rebel groups in fact represented only a minority of the five to eight million Darfurians, just “like SPLM represented a minority of people of the south at one point. Then, when the peace came, the south rallied behind SPLM to reach an agreement.”

He said it wasn't hard to realize what Darfurians wanted – peace - yet people were “hiding their heads in the sand, because we run out of options and we run out of imagination and we run out of will to make this work.... Because we have our vested interests with the government of Sudan or with the rebels and we don't want to do this.”

In doing this, said Ismail, many groups were “actually helping in escalating this conflict.”

He said it was essential that there was one mediator, with two assistants, for Darfur: “Not these people who are coming from Oslo or coming from Johannesburg or elsewhere, and talk for three days, and then they go

and disappear somewhere else, then they come back and say, what have you done guys? Part time solutions is not going to lead us to a full time resolution.”

He appealed for an “IGAD-like kind of power” to be involved in mediating peace in Darfur: “We propose at Enough that we have a quartet, from China, France, the United States and United Kingdom. And not have this quartet where we bring in diplomats who are going to have nice cocktail parties and then come back, no. We have to have real people behind them who are going to be the research, who are going to be the resource, who are going to push them and actually put them.... (on) track. This quartet will work through the (UN) Security Council, they will work through the countries that they came from; they will work through the regional powers.”

Ismail characterized Libya as the “greatest spoiler there in the region,” but said that Tripoli, as well as Chad and Eritrea should also be “brought together” to be involved in the peace process: “Each country should appoint an envoy, like the United States has done, so that we can have people with access to the power makers. Not just people who are going there to represent countries.”

The peace brokers, he added, should have powers to impose costs upon those who fail to work towards peace, which should be “timetabled.”

“You need the carrots and sticks. So far we haven’t had the cost and that is why we have failed. And this cost can be in different ways: I believe in targeted sanctions.... The sanctions regime is not all evil. There is targeted sanctions that are going to tell people that there is a cost to what you are doing; unless you do this, we are going to do this and this.”

The world, he maintained, should support the International Criminal Court in its efforts to prosecute those responsible for the atrocities in Darfur.

“We cannot disagree that there were crimes that were committed in Darfur, there were people who committed these crimes, and we cannot disagree that the Sudanese system had failed utterly in dealing with this matter. So that we have to have another direction to go, and that direction is the ICC; if they are going to deal with this matter, they are going to deal with it whether the government of Sudan want it or not.”

He stressed that he had “no doubt” that “the perpetrators one day will stand trial and we will see justice served, whether these people are from the level of (Sudan Humanitarian Affairs Minister Ahmad) Harun and (alleged janjaweed militia leader Ali) Kushayb, or all the way to the head of state (al-Bashir).”

Sudanese authorities have said activist groups and western powers were using the ICC to overthrow al-Bashir, and are more motivated by this than by ending the suffering in Darfur. From an activist point of view, Ismail denied this: “We are not asking for this to be politicized. We are asking for the legal system to take its course. What we need for the people of Darfur is not politicizing the issue; what we need for them is justice.”

He added that it was essential that a draft peace agreement be drafted as soon as possible so that those participating in peace talks could begin debate on a peace framework immediately.

“Without this (draft), you are just a tourist, going there and (standing) under every tree and talking to everybody (and achieving nothing).”

Ismail said the people of Darfur remained embittered at this stage towards peace processes as a result of what had happened at Abuja in 2006, when the “failed” Darfur Peace Agreement was signed between Khartoum

and one rebel group, the Sudan Liberation Movement. Darfurians, he said, had been excluded from the process and all efforts had to be made to ensure this didn't happen again.

“We have to have a vigorous process of consultation with the people of Darfur. Without that, these guys in the rebel movements are not going to resolve the issue. And the government of Sudan (by) itself is not going to resolve the issue; we have to get the people of Darfur involved.”

He also stated: “Not all the rebels are able to negotiate in good faith. Maybe they don't know how,” and suggested that the international community assisted the rebels to “build that capacity. We have to assist them to be up to par, so they can be able to negotiate in good faith.”

Ismail denied that the CPA was “sacrosanct; it is not written in stone. If the CPA should be adjusted in such a way that Darfur will be included (it'll be good). The CPA produced a framework for us to resolve the issues of Sudan. If that framework has a hole, we have to plug it.”

To bolster his argument, Ismail referred to the situation in Abyei, where the SPLM and Khartoum were now going before international arbiters in the Hague to resolve the dispute over the oil-rich area, even though the CPA contained a protocol about Abyei.

Without adjustments to the CPA that included the Darfur question, Ismail said the alternative was “war. The Sudanese government with its attitude of resolving this issue militarily is not going to take us anywhere. Maybe they bombard the Darfurians more; maybe they bomb Darfur (back) to the Middle Ages. Maybe they will kill all the people that are existing today.”

But even this, he maintained, would not prevent the insurgency in Darfur from “recreating itself. That is not going to stop us. The south had been fighting from August 1955, until January 2005.... We either follow the path to peace, or otherwise the Sudan that know today is going to be the Sudan that we used to know, and is going to be nothing but a footnote in history.”

Ali Hussein Dosa

Ali Dosa is a member of Sudan's National Assembly, and he belongs to the Sudan Liberation Movement (SLM).

Dozer stated: “I'm sorry that at this stage there is not one party that can step forward and say, now I have a resolution to the problem in Darfur. It is quite murky there, and there is a lack of clear vision inside and outside Sudan. Even last month I heard one of the mediators say, we've failed....”

He raised laughter in the audience when he said that the party with which his movement had signed the DPA, the government of Sudan, remained “unknown” to the SLM. He said the SLM was indeed part of a government of national unity, but suggested that the movement in effect had no real decision-making powers: “We don't know where the decision-making happens. Is it in the government of national unity, is it in the parliament, is it in the council of ministers?”

He gave insight into the in-fighting and continued bad feeling between the northerners and the SPLM, who were now part of the same government but still appeared to be bitter enemies: “The secretary general of the SPLM, who is also holding the post of cabinet minister, (said) the Sudanese state is a failed state, it's a corrupt state.... I'm sorry to say this, but this is not new as regards agreements in the Sudan: people walk away from peace agreements all the time....”

Dozer acknowledged that the rebel movements in Darfur continued to be divided, and that there vision was unclear: “We not meeting with each other. This is going to draw this issue backwards...”

Dr. Bona Malwal

Dr Malwal is an advisor to President al-Bashir. He said the ERA conference could have possibly started the process that leads to the eventual resolution of the Darfur conflict. He lamented the fact that the US did not grant visas to some people who could have contributed a lot at the conference. It created the situation, he said, where some people who had indeed received US visas would be treated back in Khartoum as “collaborators” with the US government.

He criticized the US administration with regard to Sudan and Darfur: “We have lived unfortunately through three years in which the efforts of Washington have been unfortunately to split partners to peace to be those acceptable to Washington and those not acceptable. It is very embarrassing for the government of the United States to treat the... president of Sudan (as) not able to communicate with the government of the United States. No wonder the CPA is in difficulty.”

ENDS