

## **Canada's responsibility in advancing women's roles in peacebuilding and defending human rights in the Republics of Sudan and South Sudan**

Sudan (now consisting of the Republic of Sudan and the new Republic of South Sudan) had endured over 20 years of a civil war that brought violence, death and destruction. New hope came with the signing of the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement between the government in the North and the rebels in the South. Elections and a mandated self-determination referendum led to the creation of the Republic of South Sudan (RoSS) in 2011.

Yet conflict continues in areas within the Republic of Sudan: Darfur in the east; two southern states bordering the RoSS, namely South Kordofan (especially the Nuba Mountains) and Blue Nile; and the disputed oil-rich Abyei area, with its cultural and political sympathies for the RoSS, where the North has been accused of ethnic cleansing.

The various conflicts in Sudan have caused the deaths of an estimated two million people, directly or indirectly, since 1983. Sudan has the largest internally displaced population (IDP) in the world. Although over one million have returned to their communities during the past few years, tens of thousands from Blue Nile have recently fled from fighting to Ethiopia. UN figures currently estimate that there are 4 to 5 million IDPs in the country (including the 2.4 million IDPs in Darfur).

Salva Kiir, the first president of the RoSS, told United Nations delegates recently that, "even before the ravages of war could set in, our country never had anything worth rebuilding." South Sudan has few schools or paved roads; illiteracy and poverty are widespread; most of the population lacks access to health care; and maternal and child mortality rates are very high. For decades, Sudan's Islamist regime based in Khartoum lived off the South's natural resources, building pipelines to carry southern oil to northern refineries for export to China. Now South Sudan is faced with the daunting challenge of building its own modern energy infrastructure.

KAIROS partner, the Sudan Council of Churches, affirms the immense contribution that women in both the North and the South, as well as in the Diaspora, make as peacebuilders and human rights defenders in Sudan. They are key players whose role needs to be fully acknowledged and supported.

Currently the government of South Sudan remains largely controlled by men who fought the war against the North. They feel entitled because of their part in liberating the South, while women and minority groups have been largely excluded. However, the transitional constitution enshrines 30 percent affirmative action provisions for women, and women are being urged to benefit from the space opened up by this provision.

At the same time, in northern Sudan, fear is palpable that women there will be abandoned by the rest of world. As international organizations and NGOs turn their attention to development issues facing the South, women's organizations in the rest of Sudan may be left on their own.

If the regime of President Omar Hassan al-Bashir (the first national leader to be indicted by the International Criminal Court) imposes Shari'a law on everyone in the Arabized, Islamicized North, without respect for ethno-religious diversity, it will severely limit the rights of women, especially from the South, who still live in the North. In the North, "war is part of government policy," says one woman interviewed by KAIROS. Bashir even questioned whether rape of Darfuri women is a crime that should be punished when he met with the 2004 UN International Commission of Inquiry on Darfur which was investigating alleged rights abuses.

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**In this context, KAIROS respectfully makes the following recommendations to the government of Canada:**

- ✓ **Implementing UNSC1325** Internationally, Canada has an important role to play in promoting the application of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 and the meaningful participation of women in all aspects of peace-building as an effective strategy to resolve conflict and build lasting peace. With regard to the Republic of South Sudan, Canada should:
  - immediately integrate Canada's National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security with the government's Sudan Task Force, its Stabilization and Reconstruction Task Force (including the Global Peace and Security Fund), CIDA programs and other governmental activities as they relate to the RoSS; and
  - assist the RoSS with the development and implementation of its own Action Plan.
- ✓ **Supporting civil society** The Canadian government needs to increase financial support to women's human rights and civil society organizations working in zones of conflict. An integral part of this support is increased Canadian overseas development assistance to community-based human rights education and training programs for women. Canada needs to:
  - assist civil society, including women's groups, in both the RoSS and the Republic of Sudan to monitor the transparency of oil revenues to ensure that they concretely improve the quality of life of women and their children by contributing to the social infrastructure in health and education; and
  - engage the Government of Sudan around the necessity of building a diverse society that does not impose religious law on an diverse ethno-religious population.
- ✓ **Ending Impunity** Canada must work to end impunity for sexual violence in the RoSS and the Republic of Sudan by supplying women military police to the UN Mission in the Republic of South Sudan (UNMISS) and the African Union-UN Mission in Darfur (UNAMID).
- ✓ **Holding accountable the resource industry** The Canadian government must establish mechanisms to guarantee that Canadian resource extraction companies operating in areas of internal armed conflict are not contributing to the perpetuation of human rights violations and sexual violence. With regard to the Republic of South Sudan, we call on the Canadian government to:
  - use its expertise to assist in establishing a regulatory regime to properly manage the harnessing of natural resources in the RoSS, especially in its energy sector, setting it on the path to good governance;
  - provide advice to the GoSS regarding the reinvestment of the country's oil revenues in social infrastructure, including health care, education and agriculture that result in concrete improvement in the lives of women and their children;
  - assist the RoSS through the RCMP's international anti-corruption unit to establish guidelines to prevent the plundering of energy revenues and resources by foreign corporations (including Canadian) and by local officials who live in the midst of crushing poverty and would be susceptible to unethical financial inducements.



**KAIROS: Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives** is a joint venture of eleven Canadian churches and religious organizations dedicated to ecological justice and human rights.

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