

If well-organized and well-supported, civil society actors who are truly representative can play a key role, not only in providing new ideas for peace but also in building the new relationships and social capital crucial for a lasting peace.

From the Canadian point of view, support to Sudanese civil society can entail:

- well-informed diplomatic, political and moral support;
- support to initiatives that reach the broader Sudanese public and grassroots rural populations;
- support for groups and processes that can help build bridges between the grassroots and the more established civil society actors who are better placed to directly influence the parties to the negotiations;
- support to religious and other indigenous leaders who may not traditionally engage in such politically-charged processes but who play a unique role in the societies and cultures of Sudan and may want to play some role in the peace process -- in particular to help build bridges across the cleavages in society that have been exacerbated by the conflict; the Sudan conflict, in particular, calls for special attention to issues related to the role of religion in society and politics, and cross-faith relations generally;
- we also continue to work with those who are closer to the situation, to carefully identify and channel resources to locally-organized initiatives -- as we have done with the New Sudan Council of Churches.

We must also ensure that in all our initiatives we are well-informed of not only the complex "macro-level" dimensions of this conflict, but also the best practices, methodologies and processes for conflict resolution from around the world *and* in the traditions of Sudanese cultures.

And we must do our best to ensure that civil society processes and viewpoints are brought to the centre of discussions by the international community and the principal actors in the conflict.

We are listening to our own stakeholders, including the Sudanese diaspora living in Canada — many of whom already are in regular contact with CIDA officials.

None of this is to suggest that the "civil society approach" is either a panacea or is not fraught with its own particular difficulties, especially when it comes to supporting the right actors through the right means.

There will be no shortage of challenges in the resolution of the Sudan conflict. But this is why we at CIDA are also increasing our own capacity to monitor and more deeply understand the Sudan conflict and the plethora of stakeholders.

The fact is that, no matter how much we seek to understand Sudan, its problems and opportunities — the key to our success, in playing our own small but we hope effective role, will be the relationships we Canadians develop and foster with Sudanese.