

SUDAN CIVIL SOCIETY SYMPOSIUM

Canada, June 2000

1 INTRODUCTION

The civil war in Sudan continues with little sign of any imminent peaceful settlement. A state of emergency was recently declared as political tensions run high in the Sudanese Government.

Now that the oil pipeline has been completed, there is little or no incentive for the warring parties to come to a comprehensive peace agreement. The Government is accused of stalling on the IGAD peace process because it believes that, with oil revenues flowing, it is only a matter of time before enough weapons and resources can be acquired to either win the war, or convince southern leaders to join their "peace from within" strategy through the provision of material incentives.

The opposition parties, on the other hand, (particularly the SPLA), have no incentive to lay down their weapons, now that they see their resources being taken from them and handed to their adversary. There is a striking lack of confidence in the "peace from within" initiative of the government, which has yet to demonstrate that it is acting in good faith and has clearly failed those southern groups which have signed the agreement.

Sudan government officials, opposition leaders and faction heads have all been given opportunity to express their visions for peace. But for some of these, peace is less of a priority than ensuring that their own power and influence is maintained. Thus the current "peace process" is muddied with voices which are not necessarily interested in a just and comprehensive peace. The voices of the victims - the women, the children, and the innocent civilians caught in the civil war - have no voice in any peace forum.

The recent conference on civil society in Sudan, held in Milan, Italy, and which was sponsored by a group of Italian NGOs, demonstrated clearly the value of hearing the voice of Sudanese civil society groups on issues of justice, peace, human rights and development. The Milan conference was notable in two ways:

- It brought to the public attention the competent, articulate and reasonable voices of people from a wide variety of racial, ethnic and sectoral backgrounds on issues of peace and human rights in Sudan.
- It was able to separate propaganda from fact in a credible manner.