

Oil and The Exacerbation of Conflict

The October 26 Policy Statement on Sudan stressed that Canada is deeply concerned about reports of intense fighting in the regions of oil development, and that oil extraction may be contributing to the forced relocation of civilian populations residing in vicinity of the oilfields.

Canada has in the past expressed grave reservations concerning private sector involvement that may heighten tensions or otherwise fuel ongoing conflicts. Canada has consistently discouraged companies from doing business in Sudan and in 1992 suspended all support, including export finance and trade development programs. It has also issued warnings regarding the risks of working in the Sudanese oil fields due to security concerns and the potential danger to employees.

Canada has voiced serious concerns that the Greater Nile Oil Project, which could be a key part of Sudan's post-war economy, may have a negative impact on the resolution of the conflict, and has recognizes that only an accelerated & sustained movement toward a just peace will allow all Sudanese to enjoy equitably the benefits of this natural resource. As a follow-up to the discussion in New York between the two ministers, Canada requested that the Government of Sudan initiate discussions with the private sector and independent experts regarding ways in which petroleum export revenues can be reserved for humanitarian and development purposes, shared equitably by all regions of Sudan, and verified through a formal, independent monitoring system. It has asked Talisman Energy Inc. to help move these concerns forward.

A number of Canadian and international NGOs, as well as some parties to the Sudan conflict, go beyond doubts to argue strenuously that oil exploitation is certainly exacerbating the conflict and contributing to human rights abuses.

One major area of alleged abuse concerns the forced displacement of people, particularly from the oilfields of Southern Sudan, in the interest of a more secure environment for oil extraction by the GOS and its partners, which include Talisman Energy Inc.

Talisman owns 25% of five oil blocks (3 exploration and 2 development), Heglig, Unity, and Kaikang. Thus it primarily operates in the Heglig-Pariang area of South Kordofan and Western Upper Nile or Unity State. The Assessment Mission had to look into allegations that people were being forcibly displaced from this area. The difficulties inherent in this task were compounded by the fact that people are leaving what was once a cattle-rich land, for a variety of reasons. Some are anxious to get away from the Sudanese Army and the Baggara raiders who have accompanied them into the Heglig and Pariang areas, and others are anxious not to be around when competing militia forces clash. Some move to follow food supplies, others because force majeure dictates that they do so, with all these reasons likely constituting a major violation of their human rights.

People in Southern Sudan are on the move, whether it be over a short distance or a longer one, for a matter of weeks, months, or years.