

effectively challenge the Government of Sudan and bring pressure for a cessation to oppression, military atrocities and human rights abuses.

4.3 Civil Society and the Peace Process in Sudan

The participants heard details of the role of women in Sudan as instruments of peace. Recommendations were voiced for the further involvement of women in the peace process, especially in the north of Sudan. Within the ideas presented the participants heard of ways to further mobilize women, analysis of pressure points of the GOS, training needs for women and the potential for international linkages.

The participants also heard in more detail of the People to People Peace Process that has been going on in the south of the country. In particular the Forum heard of the events that led to the Wunlit Conference in 1999 and of the positive development since that Conference. The People to People Peace Process holds particular potential if carried out further to involve more groups and communities. Reports are that more groups are indeed becoming involved and that there are tremendous results from all the work to date. The 'bottom-up' approach is bringing civil society into the peace process despite the conflicts between military and political leaders.

The view was strongly expressed that unless south-south conflicts - the so-called tribal or ethnic conflicts - are resolved, civil society in the south will not be able to influence the peace process at the formal level involving the recognized parties to the conflict.

Details were presented to the Forum participants on the involvement of other civil society actors in the peace promotion work in the south. Participants heard of the particular role of women in the People to People Peace Process especially after the Wunlit Conference. While there was early scepticism among women, there is now a sense of change, and women have participated in the peace process and want the world to hear about it. In the north, there is an active role among youth, women and professional groups, unions, peace researchers and activists, Muslim and Christian leaders and representatives of internally displaced peoples.

There is currently an important gap in civil society cohesion, especially recognizing that in both parts of the country people are working against a common force of oppression. The mutual mistrust between north and south cannot be ignored and must be resolved.

Issues concerning the People to People Peace Process include the following:

- How far and how fast can the process be extended and can it effectively go beyond the south?
- How can the word be spread that there is reconciliation at the community level, particularly to inform groups and people in the Diaspora?
- How can civil society from the north and the south be engaged in a common process or to share information?

Key building blocks for peace and a negotiated settlement include agreements reached already in the IGAD mediation process. These included a Statement of Principles. The main issues being debated are:

- Separation of religion and the state, and the issue of the 1998 Constitution.
- Borders between North and South, and the issue of oil in Unity State.