

expressed at the roundtable that there might be a greater potential for a settlement and stability if there was more support for the Sudanese government; despite its imperfections and its poor record on human rights, the opposition and rebel factions are not without fault in these respects either.

Canada's fundamental position in settling the Sudan conflict is the promotion of a non-military solution. At another level, it also concedes that activities such as humanitarian interventions or the pursuit of commercial interests should be undertaken with the obligation of doing no harm. Although not fully recognised, Canada's role and influence in the peace process lies in its being a guarantor of a peace settlement and as a facilitator (NOT mediator) of the settlement process.

Economic interests

Regarding the promotion of Canadian economic interests, the Canadian government has been cautious in advising Canadian companies about economic opportunities in Sudan. Although there is a great potential for development of the oil industry in Sudan (and a Canadian company has a 25% stake in one oil consortium that includes China, Malaysia and Sudanese Petroleum), economic ventures are risky and the Canadian government finds itself in a difficult position to support business activities in Sudan given its bankrupt economic framework, the unstable environment for business, the harbouring of terrorists, and Sudan's poor human rights record.

The view was also expressed by some roundtable participants that the pursuit of economic opportunities and the development of the oil industry by Canadian companies provides Canada with a foothold from which to pursue its interests for peace and stability in the region. At the same time, the development of the oil industry results in positive spin-offs such as employment, infrastructure support (roads, access to clean water), and the building of hospitals that ultimately help to diminish poverty and instability in the region, thereby contributing to a solution.

According to a contrasting view, such economic activities (and especially the development of the oil industry in Sudan, either by Canadian or companies from other countries) prolong the conflict by empowering the Khartoum government with the economic means to fund its war effort, thereby strengthening its position against the rebels and hampering progress towards peace. In other words, such activities benefit only one side in the conflict.

Human Rights, Humanitarian Assistance and Development

Human rights abuses have been widespread and include documentation of disappearances, torture, and detention. These abuses are committed by both the Khartoum government and by the rebel factions (the SPLM was especially singled out).

Discussion turned towards the question of whether humanitarian intervention contributes to the problem or alleviates it. According to one view, the benefits of humanitarian intervention (such as by CARE, Oxfam) outweigh its negative effects, which include perceivably legitimising the government in Khartoum. In contrast, there was concern that aid was being used as a weapon in the war against all parties and that humanitarian assistance was a fig leaf to hide the lack of more significant and substantial involvement by Canada and other countries with potential influence in the peace process.