

The Contribution of the Diaspora to the Reconstruction of the Sudan

Lucy Cavendish College, Cambridge, UK, 11 March 2005

Concordis International facilitated a one-day consultation to develop consensus on the contribution of the Sudanese diaspora to the reconstruction process. This consultation built on the previous work of Concordis on the Sudanese conflict since 1999, facilitating low-profile, inclusive research-based dialogue in support of the formal peace process. Participants, primarily UK-based Sudanese, attended in their personal capacities and represented a comprehensive range of Sudanese civil society and the private sector.

The participants recognised that the reconstruction task facing Sudan was massive and needed the mobilisation of all human resources, at the grassroots level within the Sudan as well as among the diaspora, stressing the size of the resource that is the Sudanese diaspora. There are millions of Sudanese all over the world, many of very high calibre, contrasting with the great need for skills in Sudan itself.

The participants saw an important diaspora role in fostering a vibrant civil society. They noted the many categories of the formal and informal bodies that make up civil society, but which are missing or weak in Sudan: university associations, professional and business associations, trade unions, farmers' groups, religious groups, media associations, political parties, human rights organisations, youth organisations, student unions, women's groups, traditional leaders, local NGOs, cultural bodies (arts, literature, history, science etc), nomadic groups, ex-military associations, sporting groups etc. This is not helped by the close association of many NGOs with the Government. Participants discussed how the diaspora could support such bodies and noted the need to influence the government to respect human rights and freedoms.

Participants highlighted the importance of investment in the development of Sudan and acknowledged how influential the diaspora could be regarding investment. To facilitate the investment of finance and people (including the 2 million highly educated Sudanese around the world), they felt that issues of financial regulation, governance, health and education must be addressed to provide an environment conducive to reconstruction. To encourage investors to return, the Government of National Unity would need to make credible assurances to investors, e.g. regarding transparency and security of banking.

On the issue of education, it was emphasised that university education was essential to the development of the Sudan, but that the quality of universities had declined in Sudan over time through restrictive policies. The participants believed that the academic diaspora could help to raise the standard of teaching in Sudanese universities.

Regarding the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), participants identified that the lack of previous inclusiveness in the peace process made it essential to provide wide consultation and dissemination of information about the impact of the CPA. They desired more information from both main parties on how the agreement would work in practice, e.g. regarding respect for human rights. Issues to be addressed included disarmament, prosecution for war crimes, transparency, religion and the state, regional identities, IDPs (including the 4 million southerners in the north), security, fair representation and religious freedom.

Overall, participants were very positive about the opportunity provided by the consultation but recognised that one day had not been enough. They asked Concordis to facilitate further dialogue in the following subject areas:

- An informative evaluation of the CPA in general and its implementation process in particular, focusing on how the agreement could be made more inclusive;
- A meeting with potential investors in the Sudan to look at the preconditions for willingness to invest;
- A meeting with DFID, the FCO and international relief organisations (e.g. Oxfam, Save the Children) to establish how Sudanese diaspora organisations could play a greater role;
- Individual meetings around specific issues relating to the reconstruction of Sudan focusing on the professional sector (e.g. education, health, gender issues – to include civil society representation and international expert advice).

