

Sudan's National Dialogue Conference: The Permissible Questions

Elshafie Khidir Saeid

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Abstract

Since its independence in 1956, Sudan has been considered as a recipe for civil wars and continuous violent political, social and ethnic conflicts. These wars & conflicts are embracing national crises that have affected all aspects of political, economic, social and the spiritual life in the country. They are endemic and deeply rooted, and looked upon as natural manifestations of the unsolved questions related to the constitutional & structural issues of the state building of the newly independent countries. Since the dawn of the independence, many attempts have been carried, through dialogues & negotiations, to resolve this chronic devastating situation in the country, but none of them has succeeded.

In 2014, a newly National Dialogue process was launched at the initiative of the Sudanese president, Omer Elbashir. However, from the start, two main serious questions faced the process: A- Is it a genuine process, or is it just a survival maneuver for the ruling regime? B- In light of the failure of all previous attempts of dialogue, what are the guarantees that this new attempt will not fail? It is worth noting that after the failure of any of the previous attempts, the Sudanese crisis became more complex.

This case study is elaborating on the details of this new National Dialogue process in Sudan, exploring its prospects & trying to see how it differs from the previous attempts & what the lessons it will draw from them, and to see if it is capable to avoid the junctions of failure connected with those previous dialogue processes.

About this Publication:

This is a pilot case study on Sudan's ongoing National Dialogue, the process that emerged as an initiative from the Sudanese president Omer Elbasheer, and was led by the Sudanese government. The study was produced in the framework of a two-year project (March 2015 – April 2017) to develop a Handbook on National Dialogues funded by the German Federal Foreign Office in cooperation with the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs. The purpose of the Handbook is to offer a practice-oriented guide for comprehensively designing and implementing National Dialogues. It rests on participatory methods including 1) strategic dialogue and exchange between local stakeholders, international development and peacebuilding practitioners, and policymakers, 2) a comprehensive mapping exercise of National Dialogues across the world, and 3) in-depth case studies on National Dialogues produced by local researchers. The project is implemented by the Berghof Foundation, in cooperation with swisspeace. This publication is one of seven case studies; others include Guatemala, Lebanon, Libya, Mali, Nepal, and Tunisia. The case studies provide recommendations for on-going processes in the specific country and inform the Handbook's findings. The overall aim of the project is to improve National Dialogues and enhance the capacities and contributions of conflict parties, local stakeholders and external actors towards their successful implementation.

For further information please contact the programme director Luxshi Vimalarajah, at l.vimalarajah@berghof-foundation.org or the project coordinator Marike Blunck, at M.Blunck@berghof-foundation.org. The National Dialogue Handbook can be accessed online at www.berghof-foundation.org/publications/national-dialogue-handbook.

About the Author:

Elshafie Khidir Saeid is a leading figure in Sudanese politics, concentrating on the issues of democratic transformation, constitutional reform & State building. He was the chief negotiator in Cairo Dialogue process involving the Sudan government & the opposition parties in 2005. He was a member of the coordinating committee between the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (led by late Dr. John Garang) & the northern opposition parties during the comprehensive peace agreement negotiations. He participated and presenting papers in many regional & international conferences and seminars on the Sudanese crisis, the Middle East question, the issue of Religion & politics, the National State Building, the theory of change...etc. He is writing articles in many newspapers addressing the current political developments & towards new vision in Sudan. He wrote a book, "Tribe & politics in Sudan", and he has others under printing.

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1 Introduction

Background

Prior to the secession of its southern region, Sudan, had an area equals to a million square miles, i.e. 2.5 million square kilometers, giving it the description as the largest country in Africa and the Arab world (Sudan government 2016), and in the ninth place among the countries of the world, (see Figure 1). According to the results of the latest census, conducted in April of 2008, the population of Sudan amounted to 39.1 million people, 21% of whom live in the southern part, which was separated in 2011 to establish the Republic of South Sudan in an area of 648 (The National Committee of census – Sudan 2016) thousand km. (See Figures 2 and 3). Regarding the Sudan's population and cultural composition, it is one of the most diverse countries in the world, hosting multiple ethnicities (black Africans, Arabs and Nubians), multiple religions (Islam, Christianity and Traditional African religions), many languages (300 languages) and cultures (Al Gaddal 1997).

Sudan is a country with rich natural resources. It enjoys abundant water resources of various kinds, vast areas of fertile lands and natural forests, and with all types of climates; semi-desert, savanna, tropical, and even quasi-Mediterranean climate in some mountainous highlands. And the sole of the ground in Sudan bursts with metal wealth, such as oil, which was invested for the first time in 1999, in addition to many other metals such as gold, copper and chromium. Sudan has a huge livestock of various kinds, in addition to the rich wildlife. But, amazingly, in spite of such wealth and richness, Sudan is deemed amongst those African counties with lowest development index, where 46.5% of the population is below the poverty line, according to the latest report of the Central Bureau of Statistics in Sudan (The World Bank 2009), and most economists point that poverty rates since the year 2013 exceeded the barrier of 95% (Satti 2013).

Since Sudan attained its independence, on 1 January 1956, the country has been plagued by crises and conflicts relating to questions of identity, development, ethnicity, appropriate form of governance, etc. Such crises were manifested in the civil war that claimed the lives of millions, created a miserable reality and led to a marked deterioration in all aspects of life, including economic, political and, even, the society's set of values. Only recently, in 2005, the country emerged from the longest civil war between the central government, which is dominated by Muslims-Arabs, and the African non-Muslims rebels in the south. This war lasted from 1955 till 1972, when the conflicting parties signed the Addis Ababa Peace Agreement that lasted for ten years. However, in 1983, the war erupted again, lasting till the signature of the Ceasefire Agreement, in 2003, which paved the way for the signature of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, CPA, in 2005. According to that agreement, the people of South Sudan attained the right to self-determination, and, effectively determined, in 2011, to secede from Sudan and establish the Republic of South Sudan. Yet, civil war continued to plague the country in that a violent conflict erupted between the central government in Khartoum and the armed opposition in Southern Kordofan and the Southern Blue Nile (predominantly African with considerable number of followers of Christianity and African local beliefs).

Meanwhile, the war in Darfur, which erupted in 2002, continues between the central government and the Darfur rebels (non-Arab Muslims). According to UN figures, civil wars in Sudan have claimed the lives of approximately three million people, besides an uncountable number of wounded and disabled people, and almost seven million people that have either been internally displaced or sought refuge in neighboring countries, in addition to burning and destruction of thousands of villages. In brief, the impact has been catastrophic(The United Nations 2015)!

In parallel to the civil war, Sudan suffers from a sequence of military dictatorial rule and civic democratic rule, a phenomenon that is referred to in the Sudanese political literature as the “vicious circle” or “sinister episode” i.e., military rule overthrown by a popular uprising, then a short period of democratic rule quickly followed by a military coup again, and so forth. In 1956, a national government that was democratically elected a year earlier attained Sudan independence, but in less than three years it was overthrown by the military coup of 17 November 1958, which imposed a military dictatorship on the country that lasted for six years before it was overthrown by the October 1964 popular uprising (usually referred to as the October Revolution), which established a democratic pluralistic rule that lasted for less than five years as it was overthrown by the military coup of 25 May 1969. The second military dictatorship lasted for 16 years when it was overthrown by the April 1985 popular uprising (usually referred to as, the Intifada). The Intifada paved the way for the third democratic era in Sudan, but, yet again, and in less than five years, it was overthrown by the military coup of 30 June 1989, which for the third time established a dictatorial regime that still roosting on the chest of the country. Thus, in describing the situation in Sudan, instability prevails as the general trait. In fact, out of 60 years of Sudan’s independence, democracy enjoyed only ten years, while the rest was under the abyss of military dictatorships. And since 2002, and for five consecutive years, Sudan has maintained its position amongst the most unstable and failed states in the world (The Fragile States Index 2015).

Today, and until the time of compiling this study, Sudan is governed by the regime issued from the 30 June 1989 military coup, which is referred to as the Inqaz (Salvation) regime.¹ While such regime witnessed changes in terms of policies and individuals, its core has remained intact in terms of blatant ideological orientation, which is founded upon the imposition of the Islamic project on the state and society in accordance with the vision of the National Islamic Front, NIF, which carried out the 30 June 1989 military coup.² And since day one, the Inqaz regime embarked on implementing a number of measures that enabled it to assert full control over the state and society, in politics, economy, security, media, culture, etc. At the forefront of these measures and actions were:

- ≡ An unprecedented official policy of tyranny and human rights violations, which the NIF’s leadership adopted with aim of cracking down on opponents and, thus, subjugating them. Such policy included systematic torture against opponents that led to the death of dozens of political detainees; and excessive use of force against citizens, including shoot-to-kill for simple reasons.
- ≡ Freezing of bank accounts and deposits, banning of the circulation of foreign currency outside banks (some young people were executed after they were caught in possession of few hundred dollars and for dealing in foreign currency exchange), and disclosing bank accounts of the Sudanese businessmen and merchants for the benefit of the NIF’s traders and businessmen, who, in turn, enjoyed huge allocations of bank finance. The result was, on the one hand, an impoverished and bankrupt traditional national businessmen and capitalists, some of whom had to flee the country, and, on the other hand, an enriched and wealthy NIF’s new capitalists.
- ≡ Executing the largest ever “massacre” against the civil service by expelling thousands of competent workers, clerks, civil servants, professionals, judges, etc., and further depriving them of the right to work. These people were replaced by NIF’s loyalists without paying due attention to standards of competence, expertise and knowledge. Moreover, the policy of employment and promotion in the civil service was confined to NIF’s affiliates and supporters.

¹ The leaders of the coup called their regime Al Inqaz (Salvation).

²The National Islamic Front is an off-shoot of the Muslim Brotherhood.

- ≡ Another large “massacre” was executed against the military institution by expelling thousands of army and police officers, and by emptying the police and military institutions of any national content i.e., embarking on transforming the army, police, security and intelligence institutions into militias and ideological institutions directly reporting to the governing party. Moreover, in parallel to the army and police, the NIF established its own militias, security and intelligence apparatuses under the name “Popular Security”. All these entities report directly to the NIF’ leadership.
- ≡ Tightening the NIF’s grip over the Judiciary and justice institutions to the extent that judicial rulings have become issued from the NIF’s leadership, or, at least, with its consent in all political, civil and criminal cases. Consequently, impunity non-accountability has prevailed.
- ≡ Liquidating state-owned institutions and selling their assets at cheap prices to NIF’s cadres and companies, thus, destroying the largest productive institutions such as al-Gezira Scheme (the largest agricultural scheme in the world under one single administration); the Sudan Railways, Sudan Airways, Sudan Shipping line, etc. Consequently, almost all economic sectors went under the management, or supervision and control, of companies directly relating to the NIF, or indirectly, through individuals NIF’s affiliates and the National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS), army, police, and pro-NIF student, youth and women organizations, etc. Moreover, the regime introduced what is referred to as *Al Tajneeb*,³, i.e., setting aside part of some state institutions’ revenues generated from daily fee paid by the average man for routine transactions. These funds are not included in the state’s general budget, thus, opening the door widely for the spread of unprecedented corruption throughout the country.
- ≡ An attempt for forceful imposition of the ruling party’s vision and ideology of political Islam on the entire country, under titles and slogans such as “reformulating the society” and the “Civilized Project”. Underpinning such vision is disregard of the other, as well as ethnic and religious arrogance, hence, the spread of the culture of violence and war, and forceful conscription of students, youth and children descending from the marginalized areas and, subsequently, sending them to the bonfire of the civil war as human shields. Moreover, the ruling party adopted a backward vision towards women, attempting to drag them back to the dark ages. It further made attempts for spreading the culture of myth and superstition, and for distorting the Sudanese art and cultural heritage.

Today, after more than quarter of a century of its rule, this governing faction of political Islam exacerbated the Sudanese crisis and tossing the country into abyss of troubles and tragic reality, to the extent that, now there are concrete and clear odds and indicators of the disintegration and collapse of the Sudanese state. Soon after the secession of South Sudan, war erupted again in Southern Kordofan and the Blue Nile, now entering its fifth year amid absence of any glimpse of hope for putting an end to it despite many rounds of dialogue and negotiations between the government and the armed opposition – there were more than ten rounds of talks until the end of 2015. Meanwhile, the war in Darfur continues to plague the region despite many signed agreements between the conflicting parties. Thus the bitter reality in the country continued, and the situation has strained. It is now blocked with no hope, and the inability of the system in the country's administration seemed obvious, the wheel descends into the abyss.

Amid such crisis, and on 27 January 2014, the Sudanese President, Omar al-Bashir, announced an initiative for National Dialogue, calling upon all Sudanese political forces, including armed opposition, to take part in it in order to achieve consensus on how the Sudanese crisis should be tackled. This

³ An Arabic word means Put-aside money.

research is specifically concerned with studying the ongoing National Dialogue process in Sudan that emerged from the President's initiative.

The Research problem

As mentioned above, many attempts have been made for settling the Sudanese crisis through dialogue and negotiations between the Sudanese government and its opponents. Yet, all these attempts ended in failure, and after each failure the crisis was becoming more complex. Thus, the problem we would like to tackle in this study is: *why did all past attempts fail? What are the guarantees for ensuring the success of the emerging attempt for National Dialogue? Does the so called "Arab Spring" have some implications on the on-going dialogue process in Sudan?*

The Significance of the research

This study draws its significance from the fact that that after some 25 years of the Sudanese regime's attempt to resolve the national crisis in accordance with its own vision, and perhaps in accordance with the interests of the social strata it represents, proposes, for the first time, an initiative for comprehensive National Dialogue, and resolutely confirming its full commitment to the implementation of the outcomes of such dialogue. On the other hand, the study draws its significance from the fact that the Sudanese president announced his initiative for National Dialogue after expelling a large number (not all) of the Sudanese Islamic Movement's leaders who had long been part of the decision-making circles, though this happened at a time when the Islamic Movement's mentor, Hassan al-Turabi, and his followers, shifted towards forging an alliance with president Al-Bashir, and is actively involved in the emerging National Dialogue process .

The objectives of the research

The main objectives of this case study are:

- ≡ To investigate the current government-led National Dialogue, giving an in depth picture of the process and its peculiarities/specificities, prospects and gathering lessons learned from it, to outline needs and possibilities for effective, praxis-orientated, support.
- ≡ To address the opposition concerns about this current government-led National Dialogue, discussing its demands and activities to broaden the process, & its calls for a new inclusive and comprehensive process.
- ≡ To reflect on the lessons learned from the previous dialogue attempts which are directly related to, or relevant for, this newly emerging process.
- ≡ To reflect on best practices to address crucial National Dialogue issues such as legitimacy, ownership, participation and levels of inclusivity, decision-making mechanisms, outcome implementation, process principles, mandate or support mechanisms, ... etc.
- ≡ To investigate the role of the regional & international political & development actors in the ongoing process & the previous ones.

The hypotheses of the research

The main assumptions underlying this research include:

- ≡ That the ongoing government-led National Dialogue process may not bring about a comprehensive change in the status-quo, but it will lead to a breakthrough that goes beyond any limits that the government may draw for it.
- ≡ Taking into consideration the expected results from the emerging National Dialogue and the decision of the main opposition parties, including the armed ones, to boycott the process, the ongoing National Dialogue may well constitute a first stage that will be followed by another stage in which all other forces take part, including the armed opposition.
- ≡ Owing to the discussions taking place in the ongoing National Dialogue process, and notwithstanding the outcome of these discussions, realignment amongst political forces may well take place, including the emergence of new factions and alliances.
- ≡ All people expect that the country will slide into a cycle of violence and militia war in the event the emerging National Dialogue process fails; yet, its failure is highly likely.

The research methodology

- ≡ The case study will follow a triangular approach in collecting data for the main research, concentrating on focus group discussions, and interviews with all relevant actors.
- ≡ The data collection will rely on primary data sources as well as the secondary ones, mainly the documents related to the ongoing & previous dialogue processes, including the documents initiating the process, the draft & signed resolutions, position papers from conflict parties, inputs from mediators, national & international organisations, and materials from the media.
- ≡ The interviews will be conducted with participants to the dialogues processes, as well as with the groups that are not participating in the processes, the observers, experts, academicians, and with respondents of interest whenever possible.
- ≡ The focus group discussions will be conducted with a range of stakeholders, including representatives from conflict parties, national & international civil society and other organisations who are engaged in the dialogue process. In this regard, at least three focus groups will be established.
- ≡ Content analysis of all related documents will be carried, as well as analysis of media and secondary literature, including those related to the public perceptions of the National Dialogue process.
- ≡ A research team, composed of 5, will be established to assist in conducting the case study.

Sources and tools of the research

Include:

- ≡ President al-Bashir's address that announced the initiative for National Dialogue.
- ≡ Internal rules for the organisation of the National Dialogue process.
- ≡ Papers presented by participants.
- ≡ Minutes of the dialogue's sessions.
- ≡ Committees' recommendations and final decisions.
- ≡ Personal interviews with those taking part in the dialogue process and those rejecting it.
- ≡ Field trips by the researcher to meet with the leaders of armed movements.
- ≡ Brainstorming session on National Dialogue questions and progress.

- ≡ Books, references and articles related to the National Dialogue process.
- ≡ Media reports on National Dialogue.

The timeframe of the research

This research covers the period extending from 27 January 2014 (when the dialogue initiative was announced) until the 31st of March 2016. This is the deadline for the study, but the dialogue is expected to continue till the 10th October 2016.

The research constraints

The main constraint relates to the fact that this study has been conducted & concluded while the National Dialogue process is still ongoing. This because the deadline for the study was 31st March 2016, while by that date the final shape of the dialogue was not clear. Thus, many changes are expected to occur that necessitate a further study of the process. Moreover, the study will not discuss the implementation of the outcomes of the National Dialogue process, because the deadline for submitting this study may come well before the beginning of the implementation stage. Another constraint relates to the difficulty involved in collecting minutes of the National Dialogue's sessions, documents, and presented papers as they are only available for members of the dialogue process. Thus, the researcher had to resort to unconventional methods. Moreover, the meetings with leaders of the armed movement were full of risks as the Sudanese law bans such meetings and subjects those who engage in them to arrest.

The structure of the research

This study comprises an introduction and five chapters. In the *First* chapter, the researcher is trying to adjust the concepts and terms used in the study, mainly the National Dialogue, the Sudanese crisis, giving a clear definition of each. It deals, also, with the root causes of crisis and conflict in Sudan, giving a historical overview of the attempts for resolving the Sudanese crisis through a National Dialogue mechanism. Chapter *Two* deals, in details, with the preparation process, the surrounding environment, the participants' composition and how they were selected, the list of opponents and their stances, and the topics tabled for discussion...etc. Chapter *Three* deals with the sessions' progress and how discussions conform to the requirements for addressing the Sudanese crisis; constraints and impediments accompanying the launch of the process and how they were overcome, dialogue's outcomes and mechanisms for their implementation. Section *Four* deals with the role of the external actors, including governments, regional and international organization, governmental and non-governmental organizations, and how they contribute, either directly or indirectly, to the National Dialogue process. The final chapter, *Five*, offers some remarks, conclusions and recommendations related to the research topic.

2 The National Dialogue & the Sudanese crisis

The terms and concepts used in this study are to be clear and concrete, in terms of definition and in determining the exact meaning, what they are, and what relations they do have with each other. So, in this chapter we will try to adjust the main two concepts and terms used in the study, the National Dialogue and the Sudanese crisis, giving a clear definition of each. We will try to link the two terms through discussing the essence and the root causes of the crises and conflicts in Sudan, and giving a brief review of the historical attempts to resolve them through the National Dialogue mechanism.

Definition of the term National Dialogue

In the public domain, researchers look at the dialogue process; as meetings of people, in order to build a common understanding and mutual trust, in a manner that leads them beyond their differences, and in order to create positive outcomes. It is also seen as a certain kind of participatory processes that fit with community needs, such as the ability to peacefully resolve conflicts, the ability to cooperate beyond the narrow partisanship agenda, the ability to set an inclusive agenda for all sectors, and the ability to achieve the widest participation of the citizens (United Nations Development Program 2011).

As for experts and authorities specialized in the practice of dialogue, for example; mediators and conflict resolution experts, we find that they suggest several definitions of the term dialogue, but these definitions do not differ much from each other. For example; dialogue experts of the Organization of American States (OAS) define the National Dialogue as a process of resolving the problems, and addressing the social, political, and economic issues that cannot be solved by the hands of one party or more, such as government institutions (Organization of American States 2011). Hull Saunders, from the International Institute for Sustainable Dialogue and Kettering Foundation, defines dialogue; as a real interaction, through which human beings listen to each other deeply enough to change themselves and to practice what they learn, without giving up any of their identities. And every one does as much as they can, to understand the others' interests, and to recognize their legitimate humanitarian demands (Saunders 1999). In the same line, went Louise Diamond, from the Institute of Multi-track Diplomacy, as she sees in dialogue, not the intention to defend the opinion but to inquire, not to argue but to explore; not persuasion but discovery (Institute of Multi-track Diplomacy 2011).

On the other side, experts differentiate between dialogue and negotiation. Dialogue, they say is more changeable, and broader than negotiation, and it exists before dispute, during it and after. For example, the negotiations between the Government of Sudan and its opponents from the South ended the armed conflict between the two sides across the Comprehensive Peace Accord, but this did not provide real peace between them, which might have been achieved by dialogue. At the same time, those experts stress that, dialogue is not a substitute for negotiation and mediation in conflict resolution processes, but it is an essential part of the solution, with a goal of a lasting solution and preventing renewed conflict (Saunders 1999). In my appreciation, dialogue is a cognitive interaction of view of own opinion and the opinion of the other, and it is necessary and integral to the success of the negotiation processes, that go with it, which comes out from prior knowledge of what the other wants. In the framework of the National Dialogue there are concessions, and the earner is - at the end- the country as a whole.

In this study, we would deal with the concept of the National Dialogue, in accordance with the definition provided by the Berghof Foundation, which reads:

“The National Dialogue is a self-organized political process aiming at generating (or reestablishing) consensus among (preferably all) major political stakeholders in times of deep political crisis, in post-

war situations or during far-reaching regime change and political transition. The Berghof Foundation further distinguishes between two different functions of National Dialogue:

- ≡ National Dialogue as a mechanism for crisis management:
 1. a means to resolve or prevent the outbreak of violent conflicts
 2. to break political dead-locks and/or to re-establish minimal political consensus, while further reform and change steps will be negotiated within the (slightly modified/reformed) institutions of the existing political system
- ≡ National Dialogue as a mechanism for fundamental change:
 3. Focus on redefining state-society relations (the often cited “social contract”), i.e. far reaching institutional and constitutional change.” (Berghof Foundation 2015)

The essence and roots of the Sudanese crisis

Since the dawn of its political independence, and up to today, Sudan has been living in a spiral of conflicts and crises that left deep imprints in all aspects of its political, economic, social, cultural and spiritual life. Unfortunately, all these crises and conflicts, with their various manifestations, culminated into civil war. However, they are not just conflicts over power between the opposition and the government, and not just strife between the central government and the rebels, whether in the South or Darfur. And actually, we were not under the illusion that the crisis can be resolved and the country’s conflicts will disappear, once there is cessation of hostilities between the warring parties, or as soon as the conflicting parties sign a charter or a peace treaty. This is because the essence and roots of the crisis in Sudan was, and still is, really a conflict and a dispute over how to build a post-colonial modern national Sudanese state. In other words, the building of the newly independent country should be based on the recognition of ethnic, religious and cultural diversity, and based on the foundations of a pluralistic democratic civil system, and on the basis of balanced development in all parts of the country and its national formations, and in light of the system of government that recognizes this reality, and achieves these foundations and objectives

In our opinion, and the opinion of most of the political forces and trends of the Sudanese intellectuals, this is the entrance to achieve the dream of breaking the “sinister episode”, referred to in the introduction of this study. It is clear that several factors govern this issue, including: the balance of power in the political conflict, and the mechanism of resolving these conflicts- through National Dialogue or otherwise. It is also clear, that the dream of breaking the “sinister episode”, will not be achieved by one strike, and at the first glance, but through several stages, where there are sometimes victories and in other times losses. So, conflicts and disputes characterizing the Sudanese crisis are the natural manifestations of the failure in resolving the fundamental issues related to establishing and building the post-colonial independent State. These fundamental issues can be included within the following four points (Saeid 2000):

I. It is known that, for the purposes of building a state which is in unstable environments, sub-state structures can be defined as follows:

a- The proper system of government, in a newly independent state, should, guarantee equitable share in power between the national formations and the different ethnic groups. This issue has not been resolved yet in Sudan.

b- Governance framework or constitution: until the moment of preparing this study, there is no permanent constitution in the Sudan, a country that gained its independence 60 years ago. Over the past decades, the country was governed by constitutions formulated by the groups that took over the reins of

power at certain times, and then these constitutions disappeared with the disappearance of this or that regime.

c- State institutions, civil and military:- Since independence, Sudan has witnessed three military regimes; each began its rein, with conducting significant changes within the armed forces, by expelling a large number of officers and soldiers from service, keeping only the loyal disciples. The National Islamic Front, later became the National Congress Party, that took power through the military coup, on June 30, 1989, expelled, dismissed, and referred to pension, more than 50000 of the officers and soldiers of the Sudanese army, and followed the policy of only recruiting the Islamists within the military and the police. It carried out the same policy in other state institutions, including the judiciary institutions, leaving catastrophic and disastrous effects (Saeid 2000). Moreover, now many of the ethnic groups, or national formations, in Sudan have their own military militias. On the other hand, the various Sudanese political forces of Sudan did not comply, through any of the democratic eras to reach a consensus on the appropriate electoral system for the Sudan, and also, there is no consensus on the role of civil society organizations in the democratic process, in a way that links the universal values of democracy with the facts of the local social peculiarities and social traditions.

II. Until this very moment, it is not yet settled the question of equitable and fair distribution of wealth, in the sense of dealing with the country's resources and development plans, in a manner that would remove injustice, by giving priority to the poorest social and national sectors. The unequal distribution of wealth and the struggle for resources are the main causes of the civil war in Sudan (**Suleiman, 2004**).

III. Until the moment of preparing this study, debate rages about the question of the relationship between religion and the state. Some political formations of Arab Muslim origin insist, according to the logic of the majority in the face of minority, on the imposition of Islamic ideology in the country, against the will of the other formations of non-Muslims and non-Arabs, and the advocates of the separation of religion from politics. This is also one of the causes of the civil war in the country (Algaddal 1997).

IV. The question of identity is always there: What is the essence of Sudanese nationality? Are they Arabs or Africans? Or is it just the so called Sudanic identity? Identity question has manifested itself in the conflicts about the language, culture, education, media... etc. (Saeid 2000).

Now, it is very clear that the crisis in Sudan is not a fleeting or temporary one, but it is a national, chronic, deep and comprehensive crisis. The roots of this crisis extend back to the dawn of the independence, then became compounded and complicated, through inadequate and erroneous managements, carried out by all the civilian and military regimes that have been governing Sudan throughout the period that followed independence until today. It is obvious, and self-evident, that the depth of this crisis is deeply rooted in the construction of the nation and the state, to the extent that it can only be solved by adopting a national renaissance project, that can be achieved, with consensus that does not exclude anyone, through a National Dialogue.

However, taking into account that Sudan has been an independent state for 60 years, we find that the social forces that shaped the civil and military regimes, that have been ruling the country since the dawn of independence, failed to address these constitutional and structural issues, which have such a fundamental and profound effect on the character of the post-independence State. Because of that, Sudan today is suffering a real tragic dilemma, and we are witnessing some of its serious indicators in the long ongoing civil war, the hegemony of tyranny systems, gross violations of human rights, suffering of the Sudanese citizens due to poverty, lack of basic necessities of life, and the spread of famine and lethal epidemics, strong indicators of the possibility of disintegration of the State, which actually began by the separation of South Sudan in the ninth of July 2011, and the concerns about the possible emerging calls for secession in the civil war zones, Darfur, Southern blue Nile and South Kordofan. We also witness these serious indicators in the impediment of the growth and expansion of modern forces in

society, the forces that are supposed to embrace the future, and in rural shaping of the city, whose luster as a center of cultural and political radiation is fading, and in the manifestation of a new form of alienation not only toward state institutions, but toward the Sudanese entity itself. Another serious indicator is the exhaustion & weakness of the political parties, and the loss of confidence in them, to a degree that forced the citizens to return back to tribe and clan, in search of safety and security, and all this entails with it the prospect of cracking and disintegration of the Sudanese society.

In response to this tragic reality in Sudan, there have been several attempts of change. These changes include military coups, in November 1958, May 1969 and June 1989, but these coups and the resulting systems, exacerbated the tragic situation. The Sudanese People went in popular uprisings in October 1964 and April 1985, which toppled two dictatorial regimes of 1958 and 1969, but this did not succeed in changing the reality. In the same direction, there have been several attempts to address this situation through National Dialogue and negotiation. Yes, they achieved some partial successes, but the overall toll remained below the desired results and ambitions in the spread of peace and democracy, and in achieving security, stability and the kick of the development process, as we will see in the historical overview below that summarizes the National Dialogue attempts in the country.

A historical glimpse:

The emerging National Dialogue in Sudan, that came at the initiative of the Sudanese president, launched in January 27, 2014, is not the first attempt in the history of Sudan to deal with the crises of the country through National Dialogue mechanism. Perhaps the Juba Conference in 1947, before independence, was the first attempt of National Dialogue in the modern history of Sudan⁴. The conference included Sudanese political leaders, from North and South of the country, to discuss how to govern Sudan. Although the negotiators concluded that Sudan must remain united, in accordance with the voluntary will of all, provided that the rights of the people of Southern Sudan are ensured, however, the conference did not achieve the desired results (Taha 2010).

During the period 16 - 29, March 1965, following the October 1964 Revolution, that overthrew the first military rule, the Sudanese political forces held a National Dialogue process, known as the Round-Table Conference, to discuss the crisis in the country. The main issue in the agenda was the relationship between North and South. The congress failed to reach conclusive results, but it formed a committee of twelve members, divided equally between politicians from North and South, in order to prepare draft proposals for constitutional and administrative reform, to be discussed in a second round table conference. However, this conference had never been held, and eventually, everything was forgotten (Khalid 2003).

In the wake of the uprising of April 1985, which overthrew the second military regime in the country, Sudanese political forces and trade unionists held a conference for National Dialogue in Kokadam resort of Ethiopia, which issued the Kokadam Declaration in March 24, 1986 (Koka Dam Declaration 1986). The declaration addressed the governing Transitional Military Council, which was formed after the uprising, to establish a new government of national unity, and to start preparing for a national constitutional conference, to be attended by all political and civil society actors in order to come out with road map towards achieving peace, justice, equality and democracy in the Sudan. But, instead of that, the Transitional Military Council called for parliamentary elections, which were held in April 1986. This move exacerbated the partisan conflicts and the competitive race for power, before reaching a consensus

⁴ Juba was the main city in Southern Sudan, now is the capital of the Republic of Southern Sudan

and unanimity on the answers of the fundamental question: how to govern Sudan? In spite of the fact that all political forces, except the National Islamic Front party (NIF), were due to attend a conference for National Dialogue under the name of the National Constitutional Conference, specifying September 18, 1989 as its date, and on July 4, 1989 began the preparation procedures, in spite of that, the NIF surprised everyone by its military coup in June 30, 1989, to confiscate the democratic political life, and to impose its rule in accordance with its own ideology, using iron and fire language (Saeid 2011).

On June 23, 1995, the Sudanese political forces, except the ruling Islamic Front, held a National Dialogue conference in Asmara, capital of Eritrea, and issued the "Asmara Declaration on the fundamental issues", that unanimously adopted the decentralized governance in Sudan, the separation of religion from politics, unity of Sudan on voluntary basis, the right to self-determination, as well as other issues concerning Sudan's future economic policy, foreign policy...etc. (National Democratic Alliance Sudan 1995). However, Asmara conference remained in essence a dialogue between the opposing forces of the Government of the National Islamic Front, rather than a National Dialogue on the national level.

Many conferences, of dialogue and negotiation, were held between the existing regime, which has been in power since June 1989, and its political opponents. Those conferences delivered several agreements, the most important ones were: 1- The Khartoum Peace Agreement between the regime and some armed opposition factions from the south of the Sudan (April 1997). 2- The Comprehensive Peace Accord between the regime and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement, SPLM (January 2005). 3- The Cairo Agreement between the regime and the historical and traditional opposition parties (June 2005). 4-The East Accord between the regime and the armed opposition forces represented groups in Eastern Sudan- most notably the Beja- (October 2006). 5- The Abuja Darfur Peace Agreement between the regime and some Darfurian armed movements (May 2006), but it did not hold up much, and the leaders of the signatory movements reverted again to armed opposition. 6- The Doha Darfur Peace Agreement between the regime and some other Darfurian armed opposition groups (July 2011). Of course, all of these dialogues and negotiations, and the ensuing agreements, led to transfer a number of those who were in the opposition's location, to the ranks of government and to participation with the ruling party in the legislative and executive governing bodies. But, despite of that, none of them ended the war or silenced the guns. In the contrary, the nation was divided into two States, with exacerbated stifling crisis in each, and many of the opposition leaders returned back to their ranks of the opposition.

Permissible questions about the seriousness of the Emerging National Dialogue Initiative:

Given the numbers and frequency of dialogue initiatives between the present Sudanese regime and its opponents, and the resulting agreements that have yielded only failure and increasingly complicated the crisis, questioning the feasibility of the on-going National Dialogue process is sensible. In fact, the Sudanese people are questioning whether this emerging National Dialogue, which was launched at the initiative of the current ruling regime in Khartoum, is a serious process, or simply a maneuver to gain time in order to survive longer in power? In light of the failure of all previous attempts of dialogue, what are the guarantees of that the ongoing National Dialogue attempt will not fail, noting that after the failure of any of the previous attempts, the Sudanese crisis became more complex? Of course, this question could have two possible answers, but the clear fact is that the Sudan could sustain only one answer that can be summarized in one statement saying that a successful National Dialogue is the one that could prevent the collapse of the Sudan.

During our review, in the next chapter and the chapters that follow, we will try to give the details of the emerging, ongoing National Dialogue process in Sudan.

3 Preliminarily and Preparatory measures for Sudan's Emerging National Dialogue Conference

Call for the Dialogue: Background and Context

On 27th January 2014, and for the first time ever in a quarter of a century of its unilateral rule, the current regime of Sudan proposed, through President Al-Bashir, an initiative for comprehensive National Dialogue. What is the background and context of such a call, or initiative? An answer to this question shall be provided through reviewing the states of the country and political mobility in it, on the side of the Government and that of the Opposition.

First, as for the state of the country:

Quarter of a century ago President Al-Bashir seized power through a military coup. His regime monopolized power for a period amounting to half of the years of the independent Sudan. Such period has been characterized by exacerbating conflicts and deepening crises, now threatening the very Sudanese entity. As mentioned earlier, these crises are manifest in a number of indicators:

- ≡ Sudan's disintegration already began with the secession of South Sudan. Calls for self-determination in other conflict areas are growing, raising concerns about further disintegration of Sudan.
- ≡ Protracted civil war, spread of systematic killing throughout the country, and destruction in the peripheries.
- ≡ Exacerbating racial and tribal hatred leading to bloody confrontations.
- ≡ An economy at the edge of collapse, and deteriorating basic services and living conditions.
- ≡ Spread of unprecedented corruption under state protection.
- ≡ Brain drainage and rise of new forms of alienation not towards the State or the government only, but, also, towards the very Sudanese entity.

Against this background, the need for the unity of the Sudanese internal front becomes pressing, thus, the significance of a National Dialogue mechanism. (Hamad 2013).

Second, as for the state of the governing party

Following the September 2013 youth protests which was violently and brutally crushed by the government using excessive forces (Janjaweed militias)⁵ against peaceful protesters, killing some 200 young people, talk about institutional reform and National Dialogue began amongst the ruling National

⁵ The pro-government brutal and bloody militias fighting the armed movements in Darfur. They kill, rape and burn villages. The term Janjaweed is coined by the people of Darfur in their local language and means the jinni or demon riding a horse and kills using the machine gun G3.

Congress Party's inner circles. Preceding these protests was an attempted coup by a number of Islamist army officers, led by Wad Ibrahim, a committed Islamist officer who had long been defending the regime and the Islamic project. Wad Ibrahim and his comrades in arms accused al-Bashir's government of corruption and betrayal of the Islamic project. Amongst those accused of being part of the coup plot was former National Intelligence and Security Service's Chief, Salah Gosh.

Following the secession of South Sudan, in July 2011, large sections of National Congress Party affiliates began criticising al-Bashir's rule, calling for reform. Amongst these sections was "Sa'ehoon", a youth group comprising former Islamist Mujahideen; a parliamentary group led by Ghazi Salah el-Din, who later defected the ruling party and established the Reform Now Movement; and a group of Islamist university lecturers led by Prof. Mohamed Saeed Khalifa of al-Azhari University, also defected the ruling party. (Zain al-Abdeen 2014)

The state of the governing party at the eve of the National Dialogue's call can be summed up as follows:

- ≡ The solid government base began to be shaky as of 2012, hence, it became necessary for the ruling National Congress Party to think of urgent and effective measures to regain defectors and restore ability for action and achievement.
- ≡ The ruling party failed to eliminate the Opposition, civil and military alike. Instead, opposition grew widely throughout the country. This pushed the ruling party to search for other means than oppression.
- ≡ As the governing party became impotent in terms of ability to rule the country, many circles amongst it expressed concern about the collapse of the entire Islamic project, and thus called for an urgent plan to rescue it.
- ≡ In relation to the above, the appropriate mechanism for rescuing the entire Islamic project is the National Dialogue mechanism.

Third, as for the state of the Opposition:

Since the early days of the National Islamic Front's military coup, the opposition was organized in a clandestine resistance inside the country and in an open one outside the country with the aim of bringing down the regime and restoring democracy. Given the nature of opposition work and organizational structure, the outcome of its resistance is characterized by main three traits:

- ≡ In terms of organizational structure: the most important organizational structure under which the opposition allied was the National Democratic Alliance, the largest opposition front in the history of modern Sudan. The activities of that alliance continued from 1989 till 2005 when the Alliance signed the Cairo Agreement with the Government and joined the transitional parliament that was issued from the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Accord. Subsequently, the opposition allied under different structures such as the Sudanese Body for Defending Freedoms, which later became the National Political Forces Alliance (2008), and then the National Consensus Forces (2009), which joined a broader umbrella, the Sudan Call (2014) that joins the National Consensus Forces, the Revolutionary front (umbrella group of armed movements – mainly SPLM/N & Darfour movements - the Umma party and the Civil Society. Also, there are other opposition alliances, mainly comprising the ruling National Congress Party's defectors and former allies, which oppose the government from positions different from those of the main opposition alliance.
- ≡ In terms of the nature of opposition activity: the Opposition has been, and still, trying to activate armed work and popular uprising as mechanisms for bringing down the regime, yet

an influential section of the Opposition didn't exclude dialogue and political compromise as an option.

- ≡ In terms of opposition activity outcomes: opposition work failed to achieve decisive outcomes in its resistance to the governing National Congress Party; it failed to bring down the government neither through a popular uprising nor military work. Instead, divisions became inherent amongst the opposition, which failed to create a unified opposition center, discourse and tactics. Consequently, it began to talk about compromise with the government through dialogue, though it claims that the aim of such "compromise" is the dismantling of the regime.

In brief, what we can say here is that the balance of forces between the government and Opposition has reached a point of weakness i.e., a "balance of weakness", as each failed to undercut the other. As it is well known, balance of weakness summons the need for dialogue, especially when read in relation to experiences of countries of the "Arab Spring" such Libya, Syria and Yemen where civil war, destruction and bloodshed prevailed.

The road to the National Dialogue

In November 2013, President al-Bashir relieved the most influential Islamist figures off his government, arguing that such step was the first in renewing the Party's blood, stressing that more steps will follow, including restructuring of the ruling party, renewing its internal rules and changing its old policies so as to cope with the expected reconciliation stage. However, perhaps that step was meant to expel extremist Islamist leaders or whoever stands as barrier before the expected reconciliation, following the accomplishment of the National Dialogue, which will take place at the expense of the old influential figures or at the expense of potential competitors from the new cadres. (Zain al-Abdeen 2014).

On 27th January 2014, President al-Bashir called upon all Sudanese political parties, pro and anti-government alike, to attend a meeting for deliberating the fundamental questions facing the country in preparation for a comprehensive "national leap". The Political forces reacted differently to the President's call. On the basis of these different positions, the Opposition can be divided into four groups:

- ≡ A group that immediately and unconditionally accepted the President's call and took part in the Meeting. This group comprises parties participating in the National Congress Party-dominated government, chief among which is the Democratic Unionist Party (al-Mirghani), Democratic Unionist Party (al-Digair), the Darfuri Liberation and Justice Movement led by al-Tijani al-Sese, Beja Congress led by Musa Mohamed Ahmed, and the Council of Parties of Government of National Unity led by Abboud Jabir, who claims that his council comprises some 50 parties and movements that signed agreements with the government. However, the main opposition claims that such council of parties comprises parties of weak political influence, some of which were created by the regime.
- ≡ The second group comprises large opposition parties that accepted the call and attended the Meeting. Yet, these parties conditioned their continuation in the Dialogue to the implementation of trust building measures and creation of a conducive environment for the Dialogue, mainly unleashing public freedoms, release of all political detainees, ceasefire in war zones in Darfur, Southern Kordofan and the Blue Nile, and establishment of a transitional government to oversee the Dialogue. Main parties under this group include the National Umma Party led by Sadiq al-Mahdi, the Popular Congress Party led by Hassan al-Turabi, the Reform Now Movement led by Ghaze Salah el-Din, and the Just Peace Forum led by al-Tayeb Mustafa. However, these parties, except for the Popular Congress, soon withdrew from the National Dialogue process (as we will see later).

- ≡ The third group comprises parties that rejected participation in the dialogue process outright. It includes parties allying under the National Consensus Forces, chief amongst which is the Communist Party of Sudan, the Sudanese Congress Party, different Ba'th parties, different Nasserite parties, different unionist parties, and the New Democratic Forces Movement. This group openly expressed its mistrust of the Government, stressing continuation of its efforts to bring down the government by all peaceful means, and readiness to cooperate with the armed movements to achieve that end. This group claims that the call for National Dialogue on the part of the regime is nothing but a pretext for prolonging the regime's life and creating divisions amongst the opposition. However, this group confirmed that they, in principle, accept engagement in the Dialogue in order to put an end to Sudan's chronic civil war and crises, but they put trust building measures and creation of a conducive environment as prerequisites for engagement in the National Dialogue process.
- ≡ The fourth group comprises the armed movements, the SPLM/A-North which is fighting in Southern Kordofan and the Blue Nile, and the Darfur rebels, including: Justice and Equality Movement (Jibril Ibrahim), Sudan Liberation Movement (Minni Minawi), and Sudan Liberation Movement (Abdelwahid al-Nour). Of course, this group responded negatively to the call for Dialogue and expressed commitment to the ongoing negotiations track with the Government mediated by the international community and the African Union. This group sees the importance of convening a preparatory meeting outside Sudan under regional or international supervision to discuss procedural issues relating to the National Dialogue Conference, which should be preceded by creation of a conducive environment for the Dialogue on the part of the government, including humanitarian access to populations affected by conflict, and a neutral mechanism accepted by all to oversee arrangements for a transitional period. However, this group confirms its acceptance of ceasefire and peace-making in principle through realization of justice and equitable distribution of wealth and power between the center and peripheries.

The meeting of 27th January was confined to an address from the President that many observers saw as disappointing. Many expected an announcement from President al-Bashir to set up a national government, or unleash media and political freedoms, but the address was empty of any of these issues and was rather vague and ambiguous, talking only about what the President referred to as the "National Leap" and that the issues all political forces should focus on are: peace as a national principle necessary for renaissance; a free political society dealing with national matters on equal and consultative bases; elimination of poverty; reviving the Sudanese identity (Al-bashir 2014). Reportedly, the address that President al-Bashir delivered on 27th January wasn't the original one, and that owing to internal disagreements, the address was changed and emptied of any practicable measures, mechanism and political program (Alarabiaya TV 2014).

A month later, President al-Bashir addressed his Council of Ministers, elaborating his reform plans and calling upon his ministers to transform such strategic project into a practicable and executable program. (Zain al-Abdeen 2014).

Subsequently, President al-Bashir issued decrees allowing free activity for political parties in what appeared to be a response to demands for the creation of a conducive environment for the Dialogue. Yet, soon it became evident that such presidential decrees were not genuine in that oppressive measures against opponents continued, following the organization of a number of public political activities that were critical of the government, and, thus, political forces were banned from holding any political event outside party houses amid crackdown on the press. In June 2014, the Sudanese authorities arrested Sadiq al-Mahdi, leader of the National Umma Party, following his criticism and accusation of the pro-government Janjaweed militia, the Rapid Support Forces, of committing war crimes and crimes against

humanity in Northern and Western Kordofan. The government released al-Mahdi after his lawyer wrote, upon demand from al-Bashir, an “explanatory note”, or an implicit apology, on what al-Mahdi really meant – al-Mahdi lives in Cairo now. Moreover, Ibrahim al-Sheikh, leader of the Sudanese Congress Party, was detained for several months also for criticising the Rapid Support Forces.

Following the arrest of al-Mahdi, the National Umma Party withdrew from the National Dialogue Conference, and called for the convention of a preparatory meeting at the African Union headquarters and under the umbrella of the African Union High Implementation panel. It further called for adoption of trust building measures, creation of a conducive environment for the Dialogue, and provision of guarantees necessary for the implementation of the Dialogue’s outcomes (Umma Party 2014).

After the Government set dates (April 2015) for the presidential and general elections, the Reform Now Movement withdrew from the Dialogue’s process, though it took part in drawing the road map for the Dialogue. The Movement accused the government of being unserious and of violating the Dialogue’s road map. In parallel, many pro-National Congress Party parties abandoned their alliance with the governing party and formed a new alliance entitled, National Unity Parties Alliance, before withdrawing from the National Dialogue’s process and, then, calling for the convention of a preparatory meeting outside Sudan, which is to be attended by the armed opposition. A joint meeting between the new alliance and the Reform Now Movement expressed reservation over the convention of the National Dialogue Conference, citing “it doesn’t meet the fundamental pillars for any successful comprehensive dialogue that leads to a just and durable peace” (National Unity Parties Alliance 2014).

It was obvious right from the outset that the regime will reject any call for the establishment of a transitional government that is not under its domination; it rejected a proposal for the postponement of the presidential and general elections for one or two years until consensus is reached, through the National Dialogue Conference, on a permanent constitution for Sudan, which is to be endorsed by the upcoming parliament. The governing National Congress Party further insisted on achieving ceasefire first before reaching any political agreement with the armed movements, which, for their part, demanded a political agreement before reaching a permanent ceasefire with the government. Meanwhile, the regime continued its oppressive measures against the opposition and the press.

The behaviour of the regime and the positions of the governing party, besides the withdrawal of many parties from the National Dialogue process further enhanced doubts about the seriousness of the government and viability of the National Dialogue Conference.

Preparations for the National Dialogue Conference

On 6th April 2014, the first consultative meeting of parties participating in the National Dialogue was held under al-Bashir’s chairmanship and with participation from 83 parties. The Meeting discussed issues relating to launch of the Conference, administration and mechanisms for overseeing the preparations. In that meeting, President al-Bashir issued four important decrees probably meant for addressing opposition concerns, including those about trust building measures and creation of a conducive environment. These decrees were:

- ≡ Enabling political parties to exercise political activity inside and outside party headquarters in accordance with the law.
- ≡ Broadening media participation of all, and enhancing freedom of media in a manner enabling them to play their part in making the National Dialogue Conference a successful one.
- ≡ Release of all political detainees and prisoners that are not convicted under the law.
- ≡ A government pledge to provide sufficient guarantees enabling the armed movements to participate in the National Dialogue Conference.

For their part, opposition forces received the President's decision with sarcasm, arguing that the phrase "in accordance with the law...." means that the government will not abandon its oppressive measures and crackdown on opponents and the press. In practice, the opposition's argument has been vindicated.

Also, the consultative meeting debated the organization and the setup of the Dialogue process. It agreed that all the structures and organs of the dialogue conference should be composed of the government and the opposition parties on equal bases. In this regard, the meeting agreed on the establishment of the High Coordination Committee to lead and oversee the Dialogue. The committee usually referred to as (7 + 7) for it comprises seven representatives from the Opposition and seven from the Government, under the Chairmanship of President al-Bashir, though the National Umma Party, from the opposition, demanded an independent national figure to chair the Dialogue. It was clear that the ruling national Conference Party was adamant that the dialogue conference should be chaired by the President Albashir. This was related to the power-struggles and the insistence of the ruling party to have the balance of forces tilted towards its side. However, following consultation between the Government and Opposition, the Committee was set up in May 2014 as follows:

Opposition representatives: Sadiq al-Mahdi leader of the National Umma Party; Hassan al-Turabi leader of the Popular Congress Party; Ghazi Salah el-Din leader of the Reform Now Movement; Mustafa Mahmoud leader of the Nasserite Socialist Party; Amal Ibrahim leader of the East Sudan Democratic Forum; Fadl Sho'eb leader of the Federal Truth Party; Ahmed Abuelqasim Hashim leader of the Alliance of Working People Forces.

Government representatives: Ibrahim Ghandoor National Congress Party's deputy chairman; al-Tijani al-Sese leader of the Liberation and Justice Movement; Ahmed Sa'd Omar of the Democratic Unionist Party (Mirghani); Ahmed Bilal of the Democratic Unionist Party (al-Digair); Musa Mohamed Ahmed leader of the Beja Congress; Ahmed Babikir Nahar leader of the Federal Umma Party; Abboud Jabir secretary-general of the Council of Parties of National Unity Government.

Following the withdrawal of a number of parties (as mentioned earlier), the High Coordination Committee (7 + 7) was confined to parties allied with the NCP, small opposition parties lacking real political influence, and the influential Popular Congress Party of Hassan al-Turabi. However, on 10th July 2014, President al-Bashir chaired the first meeting of the High Coordination Committee, which was not attended by the National Umma Party and the Reform Now Movement. It was agreed in that meeting, as well as in the following ones, that the High Coordination Committee lead all stages of the Dialogue, from the beginning till the end, with the following mandate:

- ≡ Drawing a road map for the Dialogue.
- ≡ Determining the Conference's membership and agenda.
- ≡ Coordination of the work of the Conference's committees.
- ≡ Overseeing the works of the General Secretariat.
- ≡ Advocacy amongst the Sudanese people.
- ≡ Follow up of the Conference's outcomes

It was also agreed that the Committee's decision should be endorsed by the meeting of the Conference's general assembly.

On 31st August 2014, the High Coordination Committee announced the establishment of a number of specialized committees with the aim of activating the works of the "mother committee" and creating a conducive environment for a healthy dialogue process; and that each committee shall comprise two persons, one representing the government and the other representing the Opposition. Such committees include one on contact with the armed opposition outside Sudan; one on contact with the civil opposition inside Sudan; and the third one on community dialogue.

On 2nd November 2014, the second meeting of the Conference's general assembly was convened with the aim of making preparations for the National Dialogue Conference and with participation from 96 parties under al-Bashir's chairmanship. That meeting decided to endorse the High Coordination Committee's first report, a draft road map, and the Addis Ababa Agreement signed by the representatives of the Committee and those of the armed movements, on 4th September 2014⁶. Moreover, the Conference's general assembly commissioned the High Coordination Committee of accomplishing the requirements of the Dialogue's road map and determining the time and venue of the National Dialogue Conference. At the conclusion of its works, the general assembly confirmed that "the National Dialogue is the ideal way for achieving national consensus, peace and stability in the country, and that the Dialogue shall be a purely Sudanese endeavour without any intervention or influence from any other party" (Progress Report 2015).

On 20th August 2015, the third meeting of the Conference's general assembly was convened under President al-Bashir's chairmanship, who reiterated a number of decisions in his address to the general assembly, including:

- ≡ Freedom of political parties' activities inside and outside party houses.
- ≡ A two-month ceasefire.
- ≡ Full amnesty of all people carrying arms and willing to participate in the Dialogue, and providing all guarantees for them to safely enter and leave Sudan.
- ≡ Calling on those rejecting participation to take part in the Dialogue.
- ≡ Freeing of all political prisoners.
- ≡ Clear commitment on the part of the governing NCP to implement the outcomes of the National Dialogue Conference.

The main decision issued from that meeting was the determination of 10th October 2015 as date for the opening session of the National Dialogue Conference, which is to be held in Khartoum. On the basis of the National Dialogue's road map adopted in the second meeting of the Conference's general assembly, the general assembly third meeting endorsed the final arrangements for the convention of the Conference, as follows:

First, Dialogue's terms of reference:

- ≡ The Conference's motto: "Sudan for all".
- ≡ The Dialogue's general principles: a) comprehensive participation and discussion of the subjects; b) transparency; c) commitment to the Conference's outcomes and their implementation.
- ≡ Dialogue's goals and objectives: a) constitutional, political and community foundation within a consensus framework amongst the Sudanese people that establishes a just and rationale state and an effective political system; b) cooperation and solidarity amongst all Sudanese to overcome all Sudan's crises; c) consensus on a constitution and legislations that guarantee freedoms, rights and social justice, and agreement on independent mechanisms for the protection of such rights; d) consensus on legislations and measures necessary for holding free and fair elections under supervision from a commission that is politically, financially and administratively independent.

Second, requirements for conducive environment and trust building measures⁷:

⁶ For the details of the agreement see chapter four in this study.

⁷ The government commitment was unacceptable.

- ≡ Release of all political prisoners.
- ≡ Guaranteeing all political rights and freedoms of expression and publication.
- ≡ Avoiding hatred discourse and media war between the parties to the Dialogue.
- ≡ Necessary guarantees for the personal safety of those carrying arms so as to engage in the Dialogue together with a comprehensive ceasefire agreement and security arrangements.
- ≡ The Judiciary is the competent entity in settling cases relating to freedom of expression and publication without resort to exceptional measures.

Third, Conference's time-frame:

- ≡ From one to three months

Fourth, the Conference's chairmanship

The President of the Republic chairs the Conference's sessions, and in his absence the sessions shall be chaired by a leader of a party enjoying the membership of the High Coordination Committee.

Fifth, the Conference's structure

- ≡ The General Assembly.
- ≡ The Conference's committees.
- ≡ The High Coordination Committee.
- ≡ The General Secretariat.

Sixth, composition of the general assembly

- ≡ The Conference's general assembly comprises about 250 members, as follows :
- ≡ Registered political parties that have been invited to the Conference.
- ≡ Armed movements that signed peace agreements with the Government.
- ≡ Movements still carrying arms and agreeing to participation in the Conference.
- ≡ 50 national figures and community leaders – the number was raised to 70 people selected by consensus.
- ≡ Each party to the Dialogue nominates one representative and one deputy, and each party has one vote.

Seventh, the Conference's committees

Six committees have been endorsed:

- ≡ The Committee on Unity and Peace
- ≡ The Committee on economy
- ≡ The Committee on Freedoms and Fundamental Rights
- ≡ The Committee on Identity.
- ≡ The Committee on Foreign relations.
- ≡ The Committee on Governance Issues and Implementation of the Dialogue Outcomes.
- ≡ Each party to the Conference enjoys the right to have one representative in any of the Conference's committees.
- ≡ The committees shall discuss the different topics and submit their recommendations to the High Coordination Committee, which shall, in turn, submit them to the general assembly for further discussion and endorsement.
- ≡ The Meeting designated 12 competent experts to manage the six committees. The Government nominated three people to chair three of the committees while the Opposition nominated three deputies for them. As for the remaining three committees the Opposition nominated three people to chair them while the Government nominated their deputies.

Eighth, the Conference's General Secretariat

- ≡ The General Secretariat comprises 26 national figures of expertise and competence (former diplomats, experts working in international organizations, academics from different universities, etc., beside six people representing the High Coordination Committee. Selection for the general secretariat is based on consensus.
- ≡ The mandate of the General Secretariat can be summed up as follows:
- ≡ Follow up of the committees and Conference's sessions, writing of discussion topics and editing points of agreement and disagreement.
- ≡ Provision of studies and research papers.
- ≡ Documentation of the Conference's works.
- ≡ Any other tasks from the High Coordination Committee.

Ninth, Decisions in the General Assembly shall be taken by consensus; otherwise by a 90% majority.

Tenth, five national figures have been designated to mediate between the parties to the Dialogue in the event of major disagreement.

Eleventh, the Meeting agreed on the establishment of an implementation mechanism after the ruling National Congress Party rejected a transitional government proposal. The Coordination Committee shall follow up the matter with the President of the Republic.

Twelfth, the Conference's media: It was agreed to dedicate the state media to support the Dialogue through joint media committee comprising both the Government and Opposition.

Thirteenth, observers: It was agreed to invite the AU, the League of Arab States, AUHIP, and any entities or figures that are accepted by all.

Fourteenth, Guarantees: The Conference's road map says that that the Sudanese's will is the prime guarantee for the implementation of the Dialogue's outcomes.

4 Sudan's National Dialogue Conference

On the 10th of October 2015, the Sudanese President, Omar al-Bashir, Chairman of the National Dialogue Conference, opened the first session of the conference at the Friendship Hall in Khartoum. Amongst the guests that attended the opening session were Chadian President, Idriss Debi, Secretary-General of the Arab League, Nabil al-Arabi, and the Speaker of the Arab Parliament, Mohamed al-Jorwan. The number of the Participants in the opening session was 92 political parties, 9 armed movements, and 74 national figures. Later, according to the General Secretariat of the conference, this number has reached 108 parties, 38 armed movement and 75 national figures. However, it is widely believed that only a very small number of the participating parties, about five, enjoy real political influence while the rest have a very weak political weight and political impact, they are either newly founded, or splinter factions of already existing parties, or created by the regime for machinations purposes. In contrast, the politically influential parties allied under the banner of Sudan Call,⁸ all boycotted the conference, besides other

⁸ Sudan Call is the alliance of the main opposition parties, peaceful and armed. It is composed of: 1- The Umma Party, one of the largest Sudanese parties. 2- The parties allied in the National Consensus Forces, namely: the Sudanese Communist Party, the Sudanese Congress party, the unionist parties, the Baath parties, the Naserists, and others. 3- The civil society initiatives, composed of large number of NGOs. 4- The Sudanese Revolutionary Front, the armed opposition, which includes the Sudan People's Liberation Movement / North, Justice and Equality Movement, the Sudan Liberation Movement, Abdel Wahid and the Sudan Liberation Movement, Meni Arkawi, in addition to other forces.

parties, including some Islamic forces. While these forces formerly announced readiness to take part in the National Dialogue conference under the condition of meeting their demands for the creation of a conducive atmosphere for the dialogue, and convention of a preparatory meeting outside Sudan that should be attended by the armed movements in accordance with the African Union Peace and Security Council's Resolution 539; the measures adopted by the Sudanese government in this respect were not sufficed. Instead, the government did not attend the preparatory meeting.

The opening session set up six committees for the purpose of discussing the proposed agenda, and determined a three-month time-frame for the committees to conclude their work and report back, with recommendations, to the High Coordination Committee (or the 7 + 7 committee), which shall, in turn, report back to the General Conference for endorsement, or rejection, or amendment. The six committees are:

- ≡ The Committee on Governance Issues and Follow-up of the Implementation of the Dialogue's Outcomes. This committee is tasked with: a) finding comprehensive answers that are agreed upon by the political forces and the armed movements on the question of how Sudan should be governed, on the appropriate form of governance, and on a permanent constitutional formula that protects plural multi-party democracy and peaceful transfer of power, amongst other strategic issues; b) setting up mechanisms for the implementation of the Dialogue's outcomes.
- ≡ The Committee on Freedoms and Fundamental Rights. It discusses issues relating to policies and legislations that guarantee full freedoms, respect for human rights, and equality of all citizens in terms of rights and duties.
- ≡ The Committee on Unity and Peace. It focuses on finding a way for putting an end to the civil war, making peace and achieving security and stability in the country.
- ≡ The Committee on Identity. It focuses on defining the Sudanese identity and the Sudanese "supreme values" in order to reach consensus amongst all civic and political forces on them and on how they shall be defended. Furthermore, it discusses issues such as Centre-Periphery paradigm, respect for diversity, and the importance of incorporating all these issues in the permanent constitution and laws of the country.
- ≡ The Committee on Foreign Policy. It discusses the fundamentals of Sudan's foreign policy, external challenges facing Sudan, and how Sudan can improve its foreign relations and enhance its relations with the international organizations that guarantee its political rights.
- ≡ The committee on Economic Issues. It discusses economic policies that guarantee to fight poverty, the realization of social justice and increasing of development rates.

In the first week of March 2016, the six committees start to submit their recommendations to the General Secretariat, which held, on 9th March, a press conference confirming its receipt of the recommendations from the all committees, and announcing that it is about to submit its final report to the High Coordination Committee (7 + 7) in a course of two weeks (by 24th of March), when the conclusion of the first stage of the National Dialogue Conference would be announced. The General Secretariat further stressed that the six committees' recommendations are deemed proposals until they are endorsed by the General Assembly, the Conference, of the National Dialogue.

Also, according to the press conference, during the first stage of the dialogue, the six committees held 300 meetings, discussing 518 papers dealing with all topics in the agenda, with participation from 675 members. The General Secretariat also indicated that most recommendations were unanimously adopted in the committees except for few ones that were adopted by a 90% majority (General Secretariat of National Dialogues 2016). In this regard, the researcher's own sources confirmed that the recommendations adopted by majority vote were confined to laws restricting freedoms, mandate of the

National Intelligence and Security Service, NISS, and creation of a prime minister post, which shall curtail the President's mandate. The objection to these recommendations came from the governing National Congress Party, NCP, and seven of its allies, all of them represent 4% of the participants in the National Dialogue Conference.

Committees' main recommendations⁹

A) Recommendations of the Committee on Governance Issues and Follow-up of the Implementation of the Dialogue's Outcomes (Alhawati 2016):

- ≡ That the National Dialogue conference shall conclude with a consensus on a national charter and on a new constitution for the country. (see Figure 4)
- ≡ A prime minister post shall be created and filled upon nomination by the President and endorsement of the Legislature. The incumbent of the post shall lead the Executive and be accountable to the President of the Republic.
- ≡ The National Intelligence and Security Service, NISS, shall report to the Presidency and be accountable to the Legislature. Its mandate and tasks shall be confined to the collection and analysis of information. It shall not enjoy the right to arrest people.
- ≡ The NISS and all other state institutions shall be banned from engaging in any economic activities.
- ≡ Setting up an all-inclusive national consensus government from parties accepting the recommendations of the National Dialogue, without excluding those parties rejecting participation in the dialogue process. Such government shall be set up within three months from the date of the endorsement of the dialogue's recommendations by the General Conference, and shall last for a four-year term, beginning from the date of its formation. The national consensus government shall rule by the 2005 Interim Constitution after making all necessary amendments to it. The tasks of the new government shall be confined to mandating the President with the formation of a mechanism for the implementation of the dialogue's outcomes in consultation with the political forces, on the one hand, and preparations for free and fair elections, on the other.
- ≡ Adoption of standards of Good Governance in combating corruption, and drawing lessons from other countries' experiences in this respect.
- ≡ The Constitutional Court shall be composed of nine members with expertise, competence, integrity and credibility, and shall be elected through an electoral college, which comprises judges from the High Court, deans of state universities' law schools. The President shall submit names of nominees to the Constitutional Court to the Legislature for endorsement.

B) Recommendations of the Committee on Identity (Ibrahim 2016):

- ≡ The people of Sudan are diverse in terms of ethnicity, culture, religion and history. Sudan is owned by all who live in it; united despite diversity; and their identity is Sudanic (from Sudan).

⁹ Up to the moment of writing this study, the recommendations of the committees are not announced and the General Assembly, or the Conference, which is supposed to adopt them did not convene. The recommendations listed here are obtained by the researcher through his personal contacts.

- ≡ Overcoming past divisions and bitters by establishing a state that is founded on values of democracy, social justice and human rights, in which all races, cultures, religions and languages are equal; and in which all people are taking part in its administration, maintenance and protection of its borders.
- ≡ The Constitution shall reflect diversity, and equate between all races, cultures, religions and languages, and shall prevent marginalization of any of these elements. It shall lay the grounds for rights and duties on the basis of citizenship, and shall guarantee the full participation of all Sudanese in the administration of their areas, on the one hand, and administration of Sudan as a whole, on the other. The Constitution shall also prohibit taking advantage of any of such diverse components of the people of Sudan as a basis for arrogance, oppression and superiority/inferiority.
- ≡ The Constitution shall guarantee equal freedoms to all citizens, including civil, political, economic and social freedoms in accordance with international conventions. It shall further ensure segregation between the legislative and executive powers, and independence of the Judiciary.
- ≡ For the sake of enhancing a universal identity of all Sudanese, the history of Sudan shall be rewritten in manner that, professionally and objectively, reflects the history of all population groups.
- ≡ Fair competition that is based on competence and integrity shall be the only way for filling public posts instead of tribalism, partisan interests and regionalism.
- ≡ Distancing the army, police and NISS from political conflicts, and building them on national basis that reflects the diversity of the people of Sudan at all levels of their hierarchies. Personnel of these institutions shall be trained on the protection of human rights, and adherence to international humanitarian laws while carrying out their duties. Employment policies of these institutions shall be based on competence and efficiency, and the Constitution shall prohibit the establishing of any forces parallel to these institutions, or outside them.
- ≡ Media shall be independent, and shall accommodate all cultures and languages of Sudan
- ≡ on equal basis.
- ≡ All languages of Sudan shall be used as medium of instruction in the primary stages of education. Educational curricula shall be formulated in a manner that reflects the diversity of the people of Sudan; diversity that shall enjoy every right to exist, develop and prosper.
- ≡ The more the state undertakes its social responsibilities towards its citizens, the more the Sudanese national identity becomes enhanced.
- ≡ The land is owned by the peoples of Sudan who exploit it for the public good upon voluntary agreement that enhances the Sudanese identity and lays the grounds for peaceful co-existence.

C) The recommendations of the Commission for Unity and Peace (Khalifa 2016):

- ≡ All state governors and leaders of executive and legislative bodies shall be elected.
- ≡ Transferring the ownership of lands over which fighting is going on to state-owned lands under native administration, the leaders of which shall be chosen through consultation and election, not inheritance.

- ≡ Lifting of the grievances that some states suffer from, particularly the states of Darfur, Southern Kordofan and the Blue Nile. The necessity of bringing about development in these states so that they can receive their share of power and wealth. Compensations shall be granted to those affected by the war.

D) The recommendations of the Committee on Freedoms and Fundamental Rights (Al-Sajjad 2016):

- ≡ Reviewing the electoral law in a manner that guarantees the transparency and integrity of the process.
- ≡ Securing the rights and freedoms incorporated in the Bill of Rights of the 2005 Interim Constitution, after making the necessary amendments.
- ≡ Protection of women and children in conflict zones, and protection of the elderly and disabled persons by the state.
- ≡ New rules shall be set for granting and lifting of immunities from state officials.
- ≡ Respect for and commitment to the rule of law in the administration of the state's affairs.
- ≡ Securing freedom of peaceful expression on all affairs concerning the country and citizens.
- ≡ Immediate cessation of hostilities in war zones, and implementation of the President's decision on the general amnesty for all detainees and those convicted in noncriminal cases.
- ≡ Repealing economic monopoly laws, and reactivating of the Investment Law.
- ≡ Fundamental rights and freedoms shall be incorporated in the educational curricula.

Worth mentioning, here, that the works, both of the Committee on Freedoms and Fundamental Rights and the General Secretariat of the conference, have triggered controversy over their transparency and integrity. In a press statement in late February 2016, Ammar al-Sajjad (Al-Sajjad 2016), the Second Rapporteur of the Committee on Freedoms and Fundamental Rights, accused the ruling party's apparatuses (NCP) of forging his committee's recommendations, indicating that the General Secretary of the conference announced receipt of the said committee's recommendations without the knowledge of the first and second Rapporteurs. Al-Sajjad further said that the NCP mobilized its forces and discarded three quarters of his committee's recommendations. Though the General Secretariat of the conference rejected Al-Sajjad's accusations, the latter said that the former changed some 18 pages of the Committee's recommendations, including those on the Bill of Rights, amendments to the Criminal Code and laws restricting freedoms. Al-Sajjad stressed that such manipulation will dash hopes for consensus and unity on the national cause.

For its part, and in a press statement on 27th of February 2016, the General Secretariat of the conference said that the Committee on freedoms and Fundamental Rights had agreed on 91 recommendations, but members of 11 parties and armed movements filed an appeal on some recommendations; and without reference to the nature of the said appeal, the General Secretariat added that eight of those members later withdrew their signature from the appeal.

A telephone conversation between the researcher and Al-Sajjad, on 6th of March 2016, confirmed the forgery incident.

E) The recommendation of the Committee on Foreign Policy (The Sudan Ministry 2016):

- ≡ Activating official and popular diplomacy, and adopting a balanced foreign policy that protects the country's interests.
- ≡ Drawing a roadmap for dealing with the US, hand in hand with the ongoing efforts exerted by the government in order to achieve normalization of relations with the US.
- ≡ Enhancing economic cooperation with neighboring countries and maintaining balanced relations with the Arab states.
- ≡ Strengthening the relations with South Sudan, and intensifying efforts for border demarcation between the two countries.
- ≡ Activating Sudan's role in regional and international organizations, and in the UN agencies.

F) The recommendations of the Committee on Economic Issues (H. K. M. 2016):

- ≡ Adopting a mixed-economy system in the country.
- ≡ Allocating part of the general budget to support education and scientific research.
- ≡ Institutional and epistemological reform, and support for the poor.
- ≡ Equitable distribution of wealth between the center and periphery.

Community dialogue

On 5th August 2014, the Sudanese Presidency launched an initiative for community dialogue in which different civil society organizations, university teachers, youth, women, students, Sufi sects, leaders of native administration, artists, etc., take part with the aim of broadening the dialogue base so that it is not confined to politicians only. On 10th August 2015, President al-Bashir launched the first session of the community dialogue, which would take place across the country. On February 2016, the recommendations of the community dialogue were announced, which can be summed up in two axes. The first relates to issues concerning the deteriorating living conditions of citizens (high prices of consumer goods, and poor basic services such as education, health, water and electricity, roads, lighting, security, etc). These recommendations shall be placed at the top of the government's agenda. The second relates to the six topics that the National Dialogue conference discussed, which, basically, calls for unleashing public freedoms, including freedom of expression and political organization, justice, combating corruption, a balanced foreign policy, adoption of "Sudanic" as a single identity of the Sudanese people, setting up an all-inclusive national government to run the country, holding free and fair elections, exerting efforts for putting an end to the wars in Darfur, Southern Kordofan and the Blue Nile, and combating negative phenomena and illegal foreign presence in the country (Press Report Alnilin Newspaper 2016).

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Negotiator/Issues

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National line up
Acknowledges:

Intellectual diversity

Religious diversity

Civilization diversity

Cultural diversity

Ethnical diversity

Political diversity

LEADS TO

Different issues & views agreed upon & protected by concession

Debatable issues & views. Agreed to continue the

The country's constancies

Inevitability to coexist with

Governing principles

To reach

National Charter

5 The Role of the External Actors in Sudan's National Dialogue

Regional and international actors, political and developmental, have continuously and intensely been engaged in finding a solution to the Sudanese crisis. The Largest part of such engagement has been during the rule of the existing Inqaz regime, which extends from 30th June 1989 to date. In fact, the first engagement of external players in finding a solution to the Sudanese crisis goes back to 1972, when some international and regional community players sponsored the Addis Ababa peace talks between the central government (led by Ja'far Numeri) and the Southern armed opposition (led by Joseph Lago), which culminated in the Addis Ababa Peace Agreement that put an end to the war and made peace for ten years. However, in 1983, the civil war erupted again.

In all critical junctures of the Sudanese crisis throughout the last 26 years, the external players contributed a great deal in attempts to extinguish the fire of crisis. The most important contributions include:

- ≡ The January 2002 Nuba Mountains Cease-fire Agreement, which took place in Geneva through direct talks between the Sudanese government and the Sudan people's Liberation Movement/Army, SPLM/A. The talks were sponsored and mediated by the Swiss and US governments.
- ≡ The 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement, CPA, between the Sudanese government and the SPLM/A, which was directly mediated by the IGAD¹⁰, the United Nations, the European Union, and governments of the United States, Britain, Norway, Netherland and Italy.
- ≡ A number of Darfur peace agreements signed between the Sudanese governments and armed opposition, chief amongst which were the Abuja Agreement (May 2006), and the Doha Agreement (July 2011). These talks were sponsored by the governments of the US, France, Nigeria, Qatar, among other countries.
- ≡ The East Sudan Peace Agreement, ESPA (October 2006), between the Sudanese government and the Eastern Front, the armed opposition in the east of Sudan, which was sponsored by the government of Eritrea.
- ≡ The Cairo Agreement between the Sudanese government and the traditional, historical, opposition parties (June 2005), which was sponsored by the government of Egypt.
- ≡ The hitherto five-year negotiations between the central government in Khartoum and the SPLM/A-North, which is fighting in South Kordofan and the Blue Nile. These negotiations are directly mediated by the African Union, AU, with close follow up by the United Nations, Germany and the Troika (USA, UK, Norway).

The continuous and intense presence of external players throughout the years of the current regime in Sudan has not been political only, but, also, a military one. Following the signature of the CPA, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) established The United Nations Mission in Sudan, (UNMIS), and according to its mandate, some 10,000-strong force was deployed to Sudan to monitor the implementation of the ceasefire agreement and disengagement of forces in the South of Sudan (The United Nations 2005).

¹⁰ The Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGDA, succeeded the earlier Intergovernmental Authority on Drought and Development (IGADD) founded in 1986 by Djibouti, Ethiopia, Somalia, Sudan, Uganda and Kenya. Upon achieving their independence, Eritrea and South Sudan joined the organization.

Furthermore, as the fighting in Darfur intensified, and in order to protect civilians, the UNSC issued, in July 2007, a resolution under Chapter Seven for establishing and deploying a hybrid force (African and international) under the name, United Nations African Mission in Darfur, UNAMID, which comprised some 26,000-strong force, of which 19,360 soldiers and 6,432 civil police. UNAMID is considered the largest hybrid peace-keeping mission in the world (The United Nations 2007).

With the intensification of fighting and violence in Abeyie area¹¹, the UNSC issued, in June 2011, a resolution for establishing a peace-keeping mission in the area under the name, UNISFA. Some 5,000-strong force was deployed to monitor the borders between Sudan and South Sudan, and to use force to protect civilians and humanitarian workers when necessary (The United Nations 2011).

As for the on-going Sudanese National Dialogue, external engagement has not been direct, and so far the process has been Sudanese led. However, external engagement has been present, though indirectly, as we can see from the following facts:

- ≡ In September 2004, and in the margins of the Third Exceptional Session of the African Committee on Human and Peoples' Rights, held in Pretoria, South Africa, a Darfur Consortium was established by non-governmental organizations with the aim of putting an end to the grave human rights violations in the region, on the one hand, and cooperating with the UN and AU on finding a solution to the Darfur crisis, on the other. In 2012, and with support from the international community, the Darfur Consortium was expanded in Nairobi to comprise more than 50 African and international NGOs operating in the African continent. Consequently, the Darfur Consortium was transformed into the Sudan Consortium with the aim of cooperating with the AU on finding a peaceful solution to the Sudanese crisis as a whole through dialogue and negotiations.
- ≡ In its report of November 2012, the International Crisis Group, ICG, proposed a managed transition scenario, adopted by a group of international community experts associated with decision-making centers in USA and the EU. The scenario was based on offering incentives for President al-Bashir, as well as the ruling party, provided that they, in return, call for an all-inclusive national transitional period that is guided by a well-defined road map. The proposed incentives include lifting of sanctions, expediting Highly Indebted Poor Country (HIPC) status and other debt relief measures, assistance and monetary aids to stabilize the economy, normalization of Sudan external relations, a Security Council request to the International Criminal Court (ICC) to defer prosecution of Bashir for one year under Article 16 of the Rome Statute. However, the ICG stressed that the incentives should only be offered on condition that transition roadmap benchmarks are met, and concrete moves towards a credible transition process are undertaken, including launching of a National Dialogue process in the country (International Crises Group 2012).
- ≡ The Geneva-based Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, defines itself as an international NGO working for conflict prevention and resolution through dialogue and diplomatic means, and for humanitarian aid for victims of conflict. As for Sudan, the Centre considers itself one of the main players in providing support for the resolution of the bloody conflicts in Darfur, Southern Kordofan and the Blue Nile. It also says that it had adopted a plan for reactivating the Sudanese National Dialogue process with participation from politicians and civil society activists. According to its records, the Centre sponsored a number of meetings in Geneva that brought together representatives from the armed movements and the international community. In September 2012, the Centre organized, in partnership with the British Foreign Office, a symposium in Cairo on scenarios for resolving the

¹¹ An area of farmland and rich oil fields located along the ill-defined border between Sudan and South Sudan, and is claimed by both countries. Its border location has also led to conflicting ethnic, cultural, and linguistic claims.

Sudanese crisis with participation from academics and Sudanese civil society activists. On the 2nd of March 2013, the Centre held, in Khartoum, a seminar entitled “Towards a Constructive National Dialogue”, in which a number of academics, politicians and civil society activists took part. And from 6th till 8th of March 2014, the Centre supported and facilitated a joint meeting, in Paris, between the Sudanese National Umma Party and the Sudan Revolutionary Front, SRF, which culminated in the Paris Declaration. According to the declaration, the SRF announced its readiness to cease hostilities in all war zones and, the two parties confirmed their readiness to engage in a National Dialogue process under the condition that Sudan Government will creating a conducive environment for such a dialogue. Subsequently, the Centre provided logistical support for the presence of a number of Sudanese political forces in Addis Ababa where they signed the Paris Declaration. Worth mentioning, here, that the Sudanese government rejected the Paris Declaration, considering it a declaration of war against it. The Centre still continues its efforts with the Sudanese political forces in order to find a peaceful solution to the Sudanese crisis (The humanitarian Dialogue Centre 2013).

- ≡ The government of Germany and the NGO, Berghof Foundation, based in Berlin, enjoyed a great deal of trust amongst the Sudanese political forces, government and opposition alike. Perhaps such trust can be attributed to transparency, scientific methodology and deep understanding of the Sudanese mentality, which the government and the institution enjoy. In 2014, and in coordination with the German government, the Berghof Foundation launched the initiative: “Support National Dialogue and Reconciliation in Sudan”. The initiative aims for a peaceful political transformation process in Sudan through engaging with different Sudanese political and civil society actors to develop an inclusive framework for dialogue (Berghof Foundation 2014). Under the umbrella of such initiative, and following an invitation from the German Foreign Ministry, the forces of Sudan Call held a meeting in Berlin, on 25-27 February 2015, and issued the Berlin Declaration, which stressed on the necessity of creating a conducive environment for the National Dialogue as prerequisite for the participation of the Sudan Call’s forces. The Declaration further determined to send a delegation to Addis Ababa to take part in a National Dialogue preparatory meeting sponsored by the AU mediation and attended by the Sudanese government (Berlin Declaration 2015).
- ≡ “The Berlin Declaration” is the notable outcome achieved by the Berghof Foundation Initiative to date. It sought to unite the opposition in favour of the next steps in the National Dialogue process led by the African Union High Implementation Panel on Sudan, AUHIP. Prior to this, some opposition factions rejected the National Dialogue and were seen to be calling exclusively for regime change. The “Berlin Declaration” was a success in that it reached an agreement by all participants to participate in the AUHIP Preparatory Conference for the National Dialogue; a first for the opposition” (Berghof Foundation op. cit.). Efforts exerted by the German government and the Berghof Foundation, for unifying the Sudanese opposition towards a positive stance on the National Dialogue, are still ongoing.
- ≡ On 29 October 2009, the Peace and Security Council of the African Union issued a resolution for the establishment of the African Union High Implementation Panel on Sudan, AUHIP, to follow up the Darfur crisis and the CPA’s outstanding issues. Subsequently, the AUHIP was tasked with the encouragement and facilitation of the Sudanese National Dialogue Conference. On the basis of that mandate, the chairman of the AUHIP, President Thabo Mbeki, paid various visits to Sudan where he engaged in many meetings with Sudanese officials, the National Dialogue’s High Coordination Committee (7 + 7), opposition leaders boycotting the ongoing National Dialogue process, leaders of civil society organizations etc. Following these meetings, Mbeki noted that that the ongoing National Dialogue process constitutes an opportunity for the Sudanese people to put an end to a protracted conflict.

- ≡ On 12 September 2014, the African Peace and Security Council, UNSC. reviewed the AUHIP' progress report on Sudan, and issued Resolution No. 456 that called upon the Sudanese parties to convene a preparatory meeting at the AU headquarters, with facilitation from the AUHIP, to discuss the procedural issues related to the National Dialogue in order to pave the way for the National Dialogue Conference. The Resolution also encouraged the Sudanese government to step up efforts towards the implementation of the agreed upon trust building measures, including the release of all political detainees and unleashing of freedoms of expression, publication and political organization, as well as drawing the necessary laws guaranteeing such freedoms, and ensuring that the Judiciary is the only entity responsible for settling cases related to freedom of expression and publication without resort to exceptional measures. Additionally, provision of necessary guarantees for the armed movements to freely take part in the National Dialogue upon the signature of ceasefire and security arrangements agreements; and facilitation of delivering humanitarian assistance to all populations in war affected zones (African Union 2010).
- ≡ On 4 September 2014, the AUHIP convened a meeting with the National Dialogue's High Coordination Committee (7 +7), and another meeting with the National Umma Party and the Sudan Revolutionary Front. The two meetings culminated in the signature of the Addis Ababa Agreement (each party signed separately) on the National Dialogue and the constitutional building process. That Agreement included the following (African Peace and Security Council 2014):
 - ≡ A comprehensive political solution is the ideal option for the resolution of all Sudan's problems.
 - ≡ Cessation of hostilities, ceasefire and addressing the humanitarian situation shall be top priority in the trust building measures.
 - ≡ Guaranteeing freedoms and human rights and release of all political detainees shall be top priority in the trust building measures.
 - ≡ National Dialogue and the constitutional process shall begin after laying down the bases, rules and measures for it.
 - ≡ All participants in the National Dialogue shall enjoy the right to freely express their views and stances.
 - ≡ The National Dialogue shall take place in accordance with an agreed upon time-frame.
 - ≡ Guarantees for the implementation of the dialogue's outcomes shall be provided.
 - ≡ All parties shall take part in the National Dialogue process in order to achieve national consensus.
 - ≡ In coordination with the AUHIP, the efforts exerted by the Berghof Foundation culminated in the consent, both of the Sudanese government and the opposition (armed and civil), to attend a preparatory conference in Addis Ababa. The AUHIP extended invitations, agenda, and set 27 and 28 March 2015 as dates for the preparatory conference. The agenda included: a) objectives of the National Dialogue; b) principles governing the National Dialogue; c) the organizational structure of the dialogue; d) decision-making mechanism; e) dialogue's outcomes implementation mechanism; f) guarantees for a transparent and credible National Dialogue process; g) a road map leading to the National Dialogue Conference, etc. However, despite all these preparations, the Sudanese government refused to attend that meeting despite earlier commitment and, hence, the meeting was cancelled.
 - ≡ In coordination with the Berghof Foundation and the United States government, the AUHIP called for Strategic Consultations Meeting in Addis Ababa, to be attended by the government of Sudan, Darfur armed movements, the SPLM/A-North, and the National Umma Party. The purpose of the meeting is to identify challenges facing the peace process in Sudan, and to reach a common ground for a comprehensive political process on democratic reforms in the country (The AUHIP 2016). The

meeting kicked off on the 18th of March 2016, to discuss a draft proposal by AUHIP on a Road Map to accelerate progress towards ending the conflicts in Darfour, South Kordofan and South Blue Nile. The meeting concluded on the 20th of March without reaching a positive result, as the opposition group rejected the proposed Road Map draft, and hence refused to sign the document. On the 21st of March, the AUHIP and the Government of Sudan delegation to the meeting signed the Road Map in a move described by the opposition as a violation and departure of the well-recognized international standard and ground rules of mediation and negotiation. The opposition group to the meeting issued a press statement saying that the Road Map was essentially intended to push the opposition forces to take part in the discredited National Dialogue in Khartoum, which was organized, supervised and managed by the Government of Sudan, without implementing the necessary prerequisites that would ensure inclusivity, impartiality, and seriousness of the process. They accused the Chair of the AUHIP, of violating the resolutions of the United Nation Security Council and the African Union Security Council on the Sudan crisis. Meanwhile, Thabo Mbeki praises the government for signing the roadmap and hopes that opposition would follow the government and sign too.

Thus, in regards to the ongoing National Dialogue process in the Sudan, the external role is effectively present, though indirectly. Perhaps, it is worth mentioning, in this connection, that some external players, donor countries and international organizations, pledged a package of incentives for Sudan, including debt relief, financial support for development projects and post-conflict reconstruction, humanitarian assistance to areas affected by the civil war, technical support for reforming state institutions, Article 16 deferral of the International Criminal Court charges against President Bashir, etc. Yet, all these pledges are tightly linked to the success of the negotiations on putting an end to the war, and opening up of the on-going National Dialogue process so as to include all parties.

Generally, it is of immense importance to emphasize that those external players should draw lessons from past initiatives for the resolution of the Sudanese crisis. Chief among such lessons is the abandoning of piece-meal palliative approaches to resolving the Sudanese crisis, for the solutions issued from such approaches tend to be fragile, and they further serve the government's divide-and-rule tactics that prolong the unacceptable status quo. The only exist from the Sudanese crisis lies in finding a comprehensive solution and real political reform, including a national reconciliation acceptable to all.

6 Conclusion (Comments, conclusions and recommendations)

It is imperative to draw attention to the fact that that the time-frame of this study summons two important considerations:

First, the National Dialogue committees' recommendations have not been officially announced to date i.e., the date of compiling this study, nor has the concluding session been convened to review such recommendations. Therefore, some amendments to this study may be made whence the concluding session is convened, especially in Chapter four, the National Dialogue Conference, and in Chapter Five, which relates to conclusions and recommendations.

Second, the study will not incorporate the implementation stage of the Conference's decisions, for this stage will be due well after the date of submission of the study.

Yet, these two considerations shall not hinder our efforts for making some comments, and for drawing some conclusions, as well as proposing some recommendations, on the on-going Sudanese National Dialogue process.

Comments

First:

The majority of politicians, observers, commentators, civil society activists, youth and women groups, etc., doubt the seriousness of the governing National Congress Party (NCP), and the viability of the National Dialogue's initiative. They see it as an attempt for rescuing the regime from its exacerbating internal conflicts rather than an attempt for rescuing the country. Judging by the regime past behaviour, they further see the call for National Dialogue as part of the NCP's foot-dragging tactics that prolong its survival. In this connection, sceptics advance a number of arguments:

- ≡ NCP's insistence on President al-Bashir chairing the National Dialogue Conference, and rejection of a proposal calling for an independent national figure to chair the Conference.
- ≡ NCP's insistence on holding the presidential and parliamentary elections before the start of the National Dialogue Conference. The April 2015 elections were boycotted by almost all opposition parties and, thus, the main political parties boycotted the National Dialogue Conference. Also, this attitude was the reason of withdrawal of some of the political forces from the Dialogue process.
- ≡ Failure on the part of the governing NCP to meet the opposition requirements before joining the dialogue process, i.e., creation of the conducive environment and trust building measures. On the contrary, the NCP continues its crackdown on opposition and freedoms, confiscating the newspapers and preventing the mass political activities.
- ≡ Though President al-Bashir reiterated, in the opening session of the National Dialogue Conference, past decisions for ceasefire, government forces launched a large-scale offensive against positions of the armed opposition, and intensified aerial bombardment, causing massive displacement amongst civilians, particularly in Jabel Marra. The offensive seriously bothered the United Nations and the rest of the international community components.
- ≡ The controversy over the composition of the High Coordination Committee of the National Dialogue (7 + 7), following the withdrawal of a number of opposition parties, which accused the Committee of being a mere partisan committee representing the governing NCP. For its part, the NCP didn't (perhaps deliberately) exert any efforts to remedy such situation.
- ≡ NCP's refusal to attend the preparatory meeting in Addis Ababa, which was to be attended by the opposition, both civil and armed, with the aim of discussing procedural issues relating to the Conference. This refusal further enhanced the positions of those opposition parties boycotting the Dialogue. Opposition parties and some other circles claim that 90% of parties participating in the ongoing National Dialogue lack political influence, and the majority of these parties were created by the regime.
- ≡ Rejection of a transitional government proposal on the part of the NCP, and insistence on maintaining the current government institutions during the implementation stage of the National Dialogue's outcomes. According to the opposition, this attitude emphasized the lack of seriousness and the futility of the dialogue.

- ≡ Manipulation and rigging of the recommendations made by the Dialogue’s committees, in addition to the practice of intimidation and enticement, besides the use of carrot-and-stick tactics on the part of the NCP¹².
- ≡ The committees’ recommendations made no reference to accountability of officials who committed corruption crimes, public funds abuse and human rights violations. The recommendations also made no reference to justice or transitional justice.
- ≡ A leader of a splinter Darfourian armed faction who participated in the Dialogue says: “...judging by my longstanding experience with the NCP, first as an affiliate and then as opponent, I neither trust the Inqaz regime nor its leaders. I am adamant that this National Dialogue process will not achieve the desirable outcomes. The maximum that I want to achieve from the Dialogue is to stop the civil war” (Darfourian leader 2016).

Second:

There are other comments that raise further doubts about the viability of the on-going National Dialogue’s process:

- ≡ In regards to the National Dialogue and its objectives, the regime doesn’t speak with one voice, and some departments do not see what other departments see. Many believe that the entire matter lies in the hands of the President. The majority of the opposition believes that the governing NCP sees the Dialogue as nothing but a new begging for its own project.
- ≡ Obviously, no powerful block emerged from within the NCP that strongly believes in the National Dialogue process as a mechanism for resolving the country’s problems. Even if such block existed, it would be weak and lacking influence.
- ≡ Judging by the prevailing political discourse and practical experience, the strategy of the majority of the parties participating in the Dialogue revolves around power sharing i.e., how each party can gain more shares in power.
- ≡ Also, the opposition doesn’t speak with one voice, and lacks a unified position on the Dialogue.
- ≡ While most, if not all, of those parties participating in the on-going National Dialogue were part of previous dialogues and negotiations with the governing NCP, they failed to raise questions as to why those previous processes failed. Even if this question has not been raised in the dialogue sessions, it should be considered a very important question at least to be discussed within the leadership of the participating parties. The researcher thinks that such question is of immense importance if we are to ensure a serious, credible and viable National Dialogue process. At least, raising such question could help the participating parties to address the principle of compromise i.e., both government and opposition shall adhere to the principle of compromise instead of undercutting each other, if they are seeing the process as genuine and serious.

¹² The General Secretariat of the Dialogue conference decided to rule out the Popular Democratic Party because the representatives of this party accused the Secretariat of fraud.

Conclusions

After studying the completed stages of the National Dialogue Conference, going on now in the country, the researcher reached to a number of conclusions, summarized as follows¹³:

First, in principle, the National Dialogue will always be a favourable option for averting violence and bloodshed, and for paving the way for the resolution of the Sudanese crisis. However, it is imperative to distinguish between a real genuine dialogue that addresses the root-causes of the conflicts and a superficial reconciliatory solution that doesn't address the root-causes of the crises, but, reduces the whole matter to power-sharing arrangements. This leads to the fact that power will remain within the current regime and trigger concerns on missing openings for solution for solutions to the Sudanese crisis (Focal Group A 2016).

Second, the standard of success of any National Dialogue shall be the realization of the national reconciliation and the national consensus i.e., agreeing on a transitional period the prime task of which should be the final elimination of the existing forms of rule that created the crisis in the first place, and establishment of new forms governed by a democratic constitution that maintains the rights of all citizens and averts civil war and bloody conflicts. The experiences of those nations that embarked on the road of national consensus demonstrate that that consensus begins with a major change in the existing power and its constitution and laws, and that independence of the Judiciary and the rule of law shall be restored so that full democratic freedoms are unleashed and, thus, citizens, political forces, media, etc., can freely express their views on the national crisis. Accountability of those committed crimes and human rights violations is also an important component of any genuine efforts for national consensus, etc.

Third, it could be safely assumed that the majority of Sudanese people want an end to the on-going wars in Sudan and return to normality. In this regard, various attempts were tried over the past few years to contribute to the effort of achieving a lasting peace through advocating a genuine National Dialogue process. What triggered this effort is the seemingly wide wedge between the Government on one hand, and the Opposition (civil or armed) on the other hand, regarding their differences on how to conduct an all-inclusive, transparent and genuine National Dialogue. The current context surrounding the dialogue processes is that although both the Government and opposition groups remain formally committed to a process or processes of National Dialogue, they doubt each other's commitment, and no single process has gained broad acceptance. Beyond the widely perceived lack of political will among the key actors, there are several sources of disagreement, prominent among which is the final goal of the process; is it uprooting of current government or new transitional and permanent governance arrangements.? In other words, is it a full democratic transformation, or the opposite; power sharing within the hegemony of one party? As stipulated in the African Union Peace and Security Council Resolution 539 "the necessity for the Sudanese parties, especially the Government, to demonstrate leadership and recommitment to processes, is necessary for achieving the goal of realizing the democratic transformation in the Sudan" (Conflict Dynamics International 2016).

Fourth, the outcome of any National Dialogue is subject to the law of compromise and balance of forces. Accordingly, confining the dialogue to political elites talking behind closed doors away from the people will render the balance of forces in favour of the governing National Congress Party, which will monopolize all means of communication with the people and, hence, the maximum a National Dialogue process can achieve is a power-sharing arrangement between the Government and Opposition (an elite pact) that doesn't address the root-cause of crisis. In contrast, a transparent dialogue that is taking place before the very eyes of the people and under a conducive environment will give people's representatives

¹³ The final stage of the conference is not convened yet, and of course the implementation phase does not start.

in the Dialogue more power, hence, changing the balance of forces in its favour (Focal Group B 2016). The researcher emphasises that it is of immense importance to take this point into consideration, for it helps us to understand, on the one hand, why the Opposition insists on the creation of a conducive environment and trust building measures as prerequisite for National Dialogue, and, on the other hand, why the governing National Congress Party rejects such requirements.

Fifth, measures for creating a conducive environment for dialogue are, in essence, trust building measures, which cannot be realized by mere good intentions, nor they can be reduced to statements and promises made by the President. Mistrust of the regime prevails amongst large sections of the Opposition. Creation of a conducive environment and trust building measure can only be achieved when the regime issues constitutional decrees and laws that meet two important things: *first*, both the Government and Opposition declare a ceasefire in all war zones and allow delivery of humanitarian assistance to people affected by conflicts in Darfur, Southern Kordofan and the Blue Nile. But, when the governing National Congress Party sends messages of dialogue and reconciliation to the civil opposition in the centre, Khartoum, and, in the same time, intensifies the war in the peripheries, the whole matter will appear as if a hidden alliance exists amongst the sons of the centre (predominately Muslim-Arabs) against the sons of the peripheries (predominately Muslim-Africans with followers of Christianity and local African beliefs), further dividing the Sudanese people along ethnic and regional lines. *Second*, it is necessary that the government freezes all laws restricting freedom, and unleashes public freedoms so that a conducive environment for a balanced dialogue is created.

In fighting the “battle of dialogue”, the regime resorts to all available means: the state apparatus, its foreign relations, the country’s resources and wealth, police, army, security, military intelligence, and, lately, the Rapid Support Forces¹⁴, in addition to a network of internal and external media, etc., compared to a weak opposition’s material capabilities. Therefore, the opposition adheres to the creation of a conducive environment as prerequisite for the Dialogue in order to enable the Sudanese people to express their views and take part in deciding the country’s future, on the one hand, and test the regime’s seriousness, which miserably failed in all previous tests, on the other. Fulfilling the conducive environment for the dialogue is merely a pledge of seriousness on the part of the regime, or a “Down payment” of what is supposed to be the successful outcome of the National Dialogue (Saeid 2015).

Sixth, undoubtedly, the National Dialogue Conference brought about new political dynamics that cannot be ignored regardless of the doubts raised about the seriousness of the regime and viability of the dialogue’s process. Effectively, and following the conclusion of the works of the dialogue’s committees, two trends emerged and immediately start making preparations for the post-Conference period (Dafalla 2016):

The first trend is sponsored by the governing party and its allied parties. The political line of this trend is twofold:

- ≡ With the endorsement of the National Dialogue’s outcomes, all parties and armed movements participating in the dialogue will become an integral part of the Government and, thus, shall no longer be referred to as “opposition”.
- ≡ Implementation of the National Dialogue’s outcomes requires the unification of the positions of the Dialogue’s participants that had different positions prior to the Conference especially; it is highly likely that a consensus on the Dialogue’s outcomes will be achieved.

¹⁴ Originally this is the pro-government militia fighting in Darfour (the Gangaweed), now it is the fighting force of the National Intelligence and security service.

The second trend is adopted by most opposition parties participating in the Dialogue; their political line is premised on:

- ≡ The current National Dialogue Conference is not an event, but, rather, a process and, thus, it constitutes a first stage of a long process; its outcomes constitute the minimum level that qualifies the transitional government to accomplish such process, including consensus on a permanent constitution for the country.
- ≡ The Dialogue's outcomes constitute the minimum level for the opposition participating in the process, which should spare no effort to ensure their implementation either through participation in the transitional government or without participation. These outcomes represent the opposition's project proposed to the Sudanese people and to those parties rejecting participation in the Dialogue, which should be achieved through peaceful means.
- ≡ The nature of the struggle over the Dialogue's outcomes between the ruling party and its allies, on the one hand, and the opposition, on the other, summons the need for the continuation of the opposition as an independent political entity with political leadership that unites opposition's efforts to safeguard the Dialogue's outcomes.
- ≡ Concretely, this independent political entity, the opposition participating in the Dialogue, shall enjoy the right to select, hold accountable and withdraw their representatives from the High Coordination Committee (7 + 7); this can be extended so as to include its representatives in the transitional government.

Recommendations

The researcher proposes the following four recommendations:

- ≡ The conclusion of the ongoing National Dialogue Conference should not be considered as the end of the dialogue process, but should, rather, be considered as a first stage in which both the Government and the participating Opposition reached a unified stance that is reflected in the Dialogue's outcomes. The second stage shall be that these forces engage – having reached a unified position (outcomes of the ongoing Dialogue) – in another dialogue with both the civil and armed opposition rejecting participation in the ongoing process. Barriers preventing this endeavor shall be overcome.
- ≡ The international community should continue its efforts for the resolution of the Sudanese crisis through the convention of a comprehensive National Dialogue Conference with participation from both civil and armed opposition. Drawing lessons from past experiences by answering the question of why they have failed in resolving the Sudanese crisis. In this connection, it is important that the Government of Germany and the Berghof Foundation continue their ongoing efforts for National Dialogue, which have, so far, achieved positive results.
- ≡ With help from the international community, and on the basis of the current Dialogue's outcomes and the positions both of civil and armed opposition rejecting participation, a Declaration of Principles, should be formulated as terms of reference for the second stage of the National Dialogue, which this study proposes.
- ≡ In order to give momentum to the current efforts exerted by the international community, a “wise men committee” comprising Sudanese independent and influential national figures should be set up to play a consultative role, together with regional and international mechanisms concerned with the Sudanese National Dialogue. Such proposed committee can be tasked with direct communication with the conflicting parties.

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Focus groups

Group A

Group B

Group C