

A radical approach needed in the national interest of South Sudan

Friday 30 November 2012

By Jacob K. Lupai

November 27, 2012 - South Sudan, up until 9 July 2011, was an integral part of the Sudan. Precisely on the 9th July 2011 it became the independent Republic of South Sudan, the newest country on planet earth. What was left was North Sudan which decided to retain the name Sudan. It was not clear why South Sudan did not adopt another name as a new independent country to break with the negative past of having been a part of Sudan. Probably the hope was for a mutual unity in the distant future. However, North Sudan was not interested in the kind of unity perceived by South Sudan. Hence instead of adopting the name North Sudan as an equal to South Sudan the name Sudan was adopted for the northern part. The old Sudan is now composed of two distinct independent countries, the Republic of South Sudan and of Sudan.

South Sudan as independent country

South Sudan has a long history of protracted liberation struggle for equality and justice until it eventually attained independence. The long concerted liberation struggle was specifically against racism, religious bigotry, deliberate underdevelopment of South Sudan and the relegation of people of South Sudan to the status of second class citizenship in supposedly a united country of equal citizenship and opportunities. The liberation struggle took a very high toll on South Sudan in terms of millions of precious lives lost, massive displacement of people, destruction of property and infrastructures and ruthless exploitation of resources. Despite all this the people of South Sudan never trembled nor surrendered but instead persevered, forging ahead with confidence until at last they saw freedom in their life time. It was memorable and indeed historic when the long protracted liberation struggle was ultimately crowned with the declaration of independence of South Sudan amid nationwide jubilation.

Challenges independent South Sudan faces

To many, independence to South Sudan was the beginning of an era of prosperity to the people who had suffered so much. In particular people had yearned for security, protection of human rights or civil liberties and accelerated socio-economic development for a high standard of living. Naturally there would be enormous challenges as the new nation was starting from the scratch. However, with in-depth analysis of the challenges, prioritisation and a pragmatic approach in nation building people could have moved forward with confidence. Nevertheless, the new nation inherited challenges and with complacency it would be an uphill struggle in nation building. Rebellions, security, human rights and food security were some of the challenges that the new nation would have to face. However, barely within a year of independence challenges seem to have been mounting with hardly any solution in sight. In view of this it is appropriate that in the national interest of South Sudan there should a new chapter opened and a radical approach adopted.

A radical approach in addressing challenges

As already hinted the challenges South Sudan faces are enormous that people must be patient but creative in search of an appropriate approach. To be creative people must be experimental and flexible in search of a better way forward in addressing challenges. Since 2005 the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) has been the lead party in government in South Sudan. It is therefore natural that as the lead party in government the SPLM will be associated with all that is happening in South Sudan whether positive or negative. On the positive side the SPLM steered South Sudan resolutely towards independence that has freed the people of South Sudan forever from marginalisation by discriminative black Sudanese Arabs. On the negative side the SPLM increasingly grew complacent, lacking in pragmatism in addressing challenges.

Corruption was so rampant but the SPLM as the lead party in government was nowhere seen taking a drastic action against those members responsible for the loss of billions from public coffers. Human rights violation occurred with impunity and the frequent declaration that no one was above the law became nothing but empty rhetoric. Land grabbing was and is a common occurrence especially in Juba, the capital of South Sudan and also of Central Equatoria State. Land grabbers have become so arrogant that they appear more powerful than law enforcement agencies and this is happening where the SPLM is the lead party in government. The SPLM must be very naive if it thinks it will still enjoy popular support while it appears to turn a blind eye to corruption, human rights violation and land grabbing. Other challenges, that the SPLM could have done better, were the post independence negotiations with the Republic of Sudan. The SPLM wanted to do it alone without being inclusive probably to claim all the credit for any success. This is, however, not nationalism. Nationalism calls for inclusiveness as a broad base participatory approach in nation building.

In addressing challenges a radical approach is needed. The radical approach must be seen to be inclusive of all stakeholders

in promoting unity in nation building. The SPLM is only one stakeholder and cannot claim to be the sole representative of all stakeholders who include other political parties, youth and women organisations, professionals, trade unions, farmers' organisations and so forth. In the national interest it is important that challenges are addressed through the active participation of the representatives of all stakeholders. For example, in the national interest the post independence negotiations in Addis Ababa should have included representatives from the other political parties and other groups of importance. Challenges such as corruption, security, human rights and land grabbing can best be addressed through the joint efforts of all stakeholders in promoting unity and cohesion in the national interest.

Since 2005 the SPLM approach of doing it alone as a lead party in government seems to have made the SPLM on the verge of utter failure. The SPLM even does not seem to be keen on upholding the constitution. People disappear or are killed yet hardly any action is taken for the law to be seen taking its course. Suspects may be arrested but convictions are unheard of. Land grabbing is savagely carried out with impunity, making land grabbers as people who are above the law but the Arab style unity is preached. The Republic of Sudan is making unnecessary demands on South Sudan in post independence negotiations yet there seems to be hardly any involvement of other political parties and professional groups in the negotiations as to what is the best way forward in the national interest of South Sudan. One radical approach is for the SPLM to adopt a consultative approach with the other stakeholders including the public at large as a sign of solidarity in the national interest. The SPLM cannot be seen as the only stakeholder. Arguably the SPLM cannot claim to have all the experience, knowledge, skills and solutions to problems South Sudan faces. Diversities when well managed strengthen.

The SPLM preaches unity but it does not seem to understand how unity is promoted. If the SPLM understands how unity is promoted then it may be the lack of practical action that is the problem. However, among other things unity is promoted when no one in the society is seen to be above the law. In this area the SPLM is complacent. For example, land grabbers are criminals and a menace to the society but the SPLM has been dead silent. The silence is like a licence to the savage land grabbers who terrorise people in grabbing their land with impunity. The SPLM should have been in the forefront to bring land grabbers to justice in line with the liberation struggle that was for justice. However, the lack of the SPLM input on land grabbing seems to show that the SPLM does not care about justice to law abiding citizens. The SPLM is hardly seen as proactive against human rights violation. People are arbitrarily arrested sometimes without an arrest warrant and without clear offenses spelt out to those arrested. Strangely all this is happening when the SPLM is the lead party in government. How does this reflect on the SPLM? Unfortunately this all reflects badly.

In conclusion, the way forward is for the SPLM to be more proactive and practical. The SPLM should be seen as proactive and practical in addressing challenges. In independent South Sudan people are not daft. People have heard more than enough.

They now want to see something in practice that improves the quality of their lives. The poor attendance in the 2nd Governors' Forum may be one explanation of people's apathy. Resolutions and recommendations were made in the 1st Governors' Forum but it is not clear how far those resolutions and recommendations were implemented to improve people's living standards. People want basic services to feel secure in their homes. Nevertheless, for the SPLM to sustain its popularity, it must come out and declare openly the catastrophic failure of basic services delivery as peace dividends to people. People will hear and may even be sympathetic to the SPLM when the SPLM is ready to open a new chapter. What is needed is the strong will to make things happen in order to make the difference between the era of 2005-2012 and the era of 2012 onwards.

The author can be reached at jklupai@googlemail.com