

Why Doha and Seisi have failed Darfur

Monday 10 December 2012

By Anne Bartlett

December 10, 2012 - If the dragging of student bodies from a water-filled ditch this week served to illustrate anything, it showed that the Doha Document for Peace in Darfur (DDPD) is not worth the paper it is written on. It also showed that Tigani Seisi is a disingenuous, disinterested and ineffective leader who, for the second time, is now selling the people of Darfur in the NCP market.

According to the Darfur Lawyer's Association, the Darfuri students were subjected to institutionalized racism with even the Vice-President of Al Jazeera University calling them "monkeys" and calling for their expulsion from the University. He did this while carrying an iron bar and participating in the assault. As a Professor myself with more than 80 graduate students, I find this behavior unconscionable and call for this man to be removed from his position immediately. No such person should ever be put in charge of an educational institution or be allowed to injure, threaten or intimidate young people in a learning environment. Sudan's educational system has long been a place of pervasive violence and inequality. This needs to stop and the international community needs to apply sufficient pressure on the regime in Khartoum to see that it does.

This situation also raises a number of other important issues. The first is the Doha Document for Peace in Darfur (DDPD) itself. Crafted by the Sudanese Government and their dubious counterparts in Qatar, the document is a worthless agreement for anyone who is not part of a fundamentalist clique. The Qataris seem to have taken on the mantle of regional peace negotiators and yet they are supporting a variety of odious individuals and groups in the region. "Spare tire Morsi" (as the Egyptians now call him), and the dictatorial regime of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt are supported by the Qatari government. The pariah Sudanese regime - which most of the Middle East has washed its hands of - has been facilitated and encouraged by the Qatari government. The Doha Peace process, which was nothing more than a circus for those seeking per diems and personal enrichment, produced a worthless document, a fake LJM movement, and Tigani Seisi as leader. This record of opportunism and duplicity speaks loudly and urgently for a new peace process for Darfur - a peace process in which the Qataris are nowhere to be seen.

A second issue that needs to be raised is the use to which the DDPD is now being put. The Sudanese regime is using such a document to divide the population in Khartoum against the people of Darfur. Using the argument that Darfuris do not deserve tuition waivers while others pay, the regime has been busy with its game of divide and rule. However, these arguments miss the point. The point of tuition waivers is affirmative action to address the historical imbalance of marginal people within the Sudanese educational system. Tuition waivers are not doing Darfuris a favor; they are redressing historical discrimination and lack of access to education over a period of many decades. The same situation should also apply to other marginalized groups in Sudan.

The third issue is Tigani Seisi himself, who has once again failed Darfur. Over recent months, he has presided, with inaction, over the worst yellow fever outbreak the African continent has seen in decades. His politics of denial have put thousands of lives at risk, while he continues to lie about the epidemic's extent and spread. He has turned a "blind eye" to the terror, ground assaults and aerial bombardment that continue in eastern Jebel Marra. He has sat by as harassment and banditry increase on the roads of the region. He has promoted and presided over the gerrymandering of states in Darfur and the cultural annihilation of groups he does not like. He has looked the other way while innocent people are killed and their cattle are looted in Gereida. The only issue he has prioritized is his usual agenda of self-interest. He whined very loudly, when his authority was usurped by the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) who killed LJM soldiers near El Fasher. He also ran and hid in his bathroom for a number of hours recently, when his own people from the LJM attacked him for failing to pay their salaries. Given this information, what kind of leader is Tigani Seisi? Clearly not one with any backbone or conscience about Darfur, that's for sure.

If the tragic loss of these young students is to serve any purpose whatsoever, it should be to generate a new conversation about Darfur's future. Should the future be served by amoral leaders and a bankrupt agreement created by a fundamentalist state or should a new attempt be made to resolve the violence in the region? Should the fantasy about "peace" in Darfur continue to be peddled, or should the world face the fact that abuse, marginalization, murder and lack of accountability are the norms by which the region is now governed?

Looking at the picture of Mohamed Younis Nil's contorted body as it was dragged out of the water this week, I thought of my own students who are about the same age. I also thought about his mother and how she must feel having waved her son off to university with excitement, only to see his body dragged from a canal later. Preparing myself for graduation this week, I found myself asking: Could I imagine a world where one's child might not even survive university? And if I couldn't, what possible justification might there be to accept this fate for others?

If you can't accept this either, please take action with your political representatives to apply pressure to change the situation in Darfur.

R.I.P. Mohamed Younis Nil, Adil Mohamed Ahmed Hamad and Al Sadig Abdullah

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