

Reply to Luka Biong's Articles: "Sudan Under Bashir: Trajectory of Shame and Agony"

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By Khalid Al Mubarak

January 7, 2013 - Dr. Luka Biong, co-chair of the Abyei Oversight Committee and senior member of the SPLM, has published an important article in "New Nation" newspaper (republished by Sudan Tribune on 27th December 12). As one of those still trapped in the civil war mindset, the usually polite Dr. Biong wrote in pre-CPA incendiary and provocative invective.

He is, in John Dryden's words: "So over-violent or over-civil, that everyman with him [is] God or devil." God, of course, is the khawagat, especially the evangelical Taliban with their black-and-white apocalyptic world view. The devil is the Sudan and its President.

As a Sudanese citizen from Abyei, he has every right to criticise; but as a highly qualified senior politician and former minister, one expects a more reasonable and considerate discourse from him, especially at a time in which the main task for both Sudans is to build on the positive momentum that was generated by the 27th September Cooperation Agreement between the two presidents. To choose this time to publish a toxic article designed to inflame passions and increase tensions is indefensible, to say the least.

Using unbecoming words about President Bashir, could be seen as an attempt to invite a similar response towards President Kiir. We will disappoint him; but will be less amenable in shredding the arguments he labels as "objective".

Luka Biong begins his article by quoting Mr. Idris Hassan, who wrote in the Arabic language Sudanese Al Sahafa, that those who struggled for independence would be gutted if they saw the state of the nation today. What Dr. Biong does not seem to note is that critics of government policy in the Sudan, like Mr. Idris Hassan, still write their columns openly, advocating a change of course and different policies.

By comparison, Isaiah Abraham, who expressed views that call for a more balanced approach to the Sudan and avoidance of support for rebels across the border, has been killed on 4th December 12. Another example is Dr. Jok Madut Jok, undersecretary of the Ministry of Culture and, like Isaiah Abraham, a staunch SPLM cadre, has been beaten up in Wau. He wrote: "If this sort of thing happens to a senior government official, what we should imagine, will happen to ordinary citizens?" The question is forwarded to Dr. Biong.

After the initial barrage of unbecoming rhetoric, Dr. Biong goes on to claim objectivity relying on sources which, he argued, supported his predictions that the Sudan under Bashir was a story of shame and agony, set to be repeated. He quotes the Global Peace Index table that places the Sudan at a low position; but he does not say that the G P Index was criticised even by the Christian Science Monitor for not including violence against women and children as an indicator.

It was also criticised by others for neglecting the weight of military expenditure and its impact. He quoted the Sudan's position but did not mention that the USA too was very low (No. 88 out of 158) behind many Arab and Muslim majority countries like Qatar, Malaysia, United Arab Emirates, Oman, Senegal, Tunisia, Morocco and Jordan. Small but influential Qatar was placed 12th, seventy sixth points above the USA. Israel too, didn't get a high rating (No. 150) only six points above the Sudan. If both the US and Israel are not much better than the Sudan, does it follow that both face a dismal prospect in 2013 and after? Moreover, the index implies that the Arab Spring had a negative effect. Could it be that the editors miss the days when the likes of Hosni Mubarak, Ben Ali and Gaddafi ensured stability and control? There is also a significant omission.

The Republic of South Sudan is not included at all in the 2012 Global Peace Index. Until the Global Peace Index. Until the management replies to my query, I have two explanations: either the index was prepared for the whole Sudan, without consideration to secession in July 2011, in which case the situation in the South would have been enough to pull the country down to the bottom; or there was no time to separate the two Sudans before publication, so the easy practical option was to combine them.

In both cases, it would not be objective to use this index against the Sudan.. Anyway, the 2013 index will soon be out. We'll see what it says about the Republic of South Sudan (the New Sudan).

Dr. Biong uses the ICC allegations to conclude that they are a source of "shame". Actually, it is an honour, not a shame, for the Sudan to stand up to an unjust international order. The allegations have increased the prestige of President Bashir and earned him the solidarity of the African Union, the Arab League and many other regional bodies; but most significantly, it won

him support among the Sudanese people, who soon re-elected him with 68% of the vote.

In siding with the ICC and not the African Union, Dr. Biong repeats a pattern of subservience to the khawagat. In the 1960s the Southern rebels sided with Israel, the only country apart from the US, that traded with Apartheid South Africa, and propped it up, while the Sudanese governments supported Nelson Mandela and the ANC financially and diplomatically, as the ANC's archives and Mandela's autobiography record.

Some Southern Sudanese rebel leaders have given the impression that they resembled Moise Tchombe, not Patrice Lumumba, (as the late Abdul Khaliq Mahjoub, leader of the Communist Party is said to have opined; according to a Sudan Tribune article by a writer who is now an adviser to an NGO).

The ICC is now irrelevant. It is an embarrassment to those who championed it. Its President has told the EU and UN General Assembly that the Court operates in a political world. That explains to us the reason why the crime of aggression was not included in its remit. It also explains why Iraq, Gaza, Guantanamo Bay and other atrocities are not the concern of the Court. The Sudan has not ratified the ICC's Rome Statutes and as such (like Security Council members, the US, Russia and China) is not bound by its rules according to international law.

Things have now come full circle as the Israel lobby in the US "honoured" L. Moreno Ocampo for his role on Darfur on 14th November 12. The lobby started the Darfur Defamation campaign by setting up Save Darfur Coalition and pushed for the ICC allegations. It has now openly celebrated the services of the court's former prosecutor.

The shame is not on the Sudan or its president; but on those who have devalued the UN Security Council by their illogical manoeuvres that politicised the Court.

Dr. Luka Biong quotes the US Freedom House which is not even-handed on the Sudan. It has got a special section called "coalition for South Sudan".

Another controversial point in the article is the brazenness of writing about corruption. Many cases of corruption have been exposed and addressed in the Sudan. However, there is nothing comparable to the corruption in South Sudan in the whole world. To his great credit President Kiir has declared publicly that huge sums of money were stolen. He appealed for the funds to be returned; but so far those influential officials have avoided punishment and kept the billions of dollars that belong to the South Sudanese people. Even donors have openly complained about corruption in the Republic of South Sudan.

Dr. Biong resorts to misleading statements and presents them as facts. He writes that the "image of Sudan" has deteriorated under the National Congress Party that governs Sudan with Sharia law. Actually, the Sudan is governed by a coalition in which the NCP is the main partner. The country is run by an interim constitution that was approved by the SPLA/M leadership. It exempted the South and Christians from Sharia. It defines the Sudan as a multi-cultural, multiethnic and multi-religious country.

The literal implementation of Sharia law was the brain child of none other than Dr. Hassan Turabi, now leader of the Popular Congress Party and a loud voice in the opposition that calls for regime change in the Sudan. In the 1980s, under President Numeiry, he even went to Cooper prison in Khartoum North to witness the first amputation of a hand (and fainted at the sight of gushing blood). Since 30 June 1989, no hand was amputated in the Sudan. Whenever injudicious and anachronistic sentences were issued by junior courts, they were overturned upon appeal or by higher courts.

At the bottom of the article, Dr. Biong gives us his e-mail address. Surprisingly, he is using the name "Kush", which he also gave to an organization. This is an attempt to "take over" the history of the ancient Nubian civilisation. Archaeologists have told us that he actually visited historical sites in northern Sudan (before the 2011 secession of the South) and was told by experts what Dr John Alexander had expressed during a Sudan Studies Association meeting in London, that no evidence exists to link the Southern Sudanese with ancient Nubia.

In a nutshell, Dr. Biong's article is a litany of inaccuracies and mistrust by a politician who seems determined to undermine any chance of peaceful cooperation between the two Sudans.

Under the title "Salva-Bashir Summit: what is expected?" Dr Biong has written a second article, published by Sudan Tribune on 3 January, one day ahead of the Addis Ababa summit between the two presidents. The reader is told that this article, like the previous one, "is also published by the New Nation Newspaper, New York-US." This might be an attempt to give the impression of an international status and reach as a syndicated writer. Actually, there used to be a newspaper with such a title in the UK, serving the black community; but it went out of business. If there is a US paper with the same title, it must be so insignificant that it has not got a website and cannot be proof of US or international impact. I could only trace New Nation News which is a website that is obsessed with colour, crime and race.

The second article is less aggressive; but equally full of inaccuracies. Dr Biong claims that any insistence on "disengagement" between South Sudan and SPLA/N is "unjustifiable", forgetting that the same insistence was made by top US emissaries who visited Juba and was even raised by President Obama with President Kiir. What is unreasonable and indefensible is to insist on

the “right” of one state to keep battalions in another sovereign state and avoid the process of DDR demobilization , demilitarisation and reintegration in civilian life.

Paradoxically, those of us who resent the western bias for the R of S Sudan and against us welcome a role now for western advisers , hoping that they can talk sense to Juba and say that expecting the western mentors to parrot everything that Juba says or does is out of the question. SPLM documents which should have been amended in 05 to signify the end of the New Sudan dream and acceptance of a referendum can now be revisited during the much delayed SPLM Convention to reflect the reality of two states ,to separate the political party’s army from the National army and liberate the SPLM/A once and for all from the bush -fighting era.

Another feature of this second article is the deliberate distortion of well-documented facts.The rebel Revolutionary Front in the Sudan never called for regime change “through peaceful means” They have openly advocated reliance on the bullet and rejection of the forthcoming elections.

In an attempt to shift the burden of responsibility for mismanagement and lack of capacity Dr Biong disingenuously claims “It is common belief in the South that the recent increase in the level of insecurity in the South is largely instigated by Khartoum with the aim of weakening the leadership of the South.” He writes “the South” not the Republic of South Sudan,because for SPLM/A hawks, the struggle is still going on (by proxy) for a new Sudan that comprises both republics.

To his credit, Dr Biong admits that the South (again not the R of S Sudan) “is facing serious economic difficulties as its foreign reserves seem to be dwindling rapidly”.As one of those who applauded the shutting down of oil wells, does Dr Biong bear any responsibility for this situation? The full brunt is faced by ordinary S Sudanese citizens ,not senior SPLM/A leaders with fat bank accounts abroad who represent the “New Class”.

The successful summit of the two presidents is now over. Mechanisms are in place to implement the provisions of the 27 September Cooperation Agreements. Teams will meet again to follow-up details. There is no alternative to this route, even if it involves delays. We in the Republic of the Sudan, the Mother country, have to be patient while our new young neighbour passes through a delicate transitional period which gives rise to unexpected actions and is fed, led and misled sometimes by half-baked ideas like the ones disseminated by Dr Luka Biong .

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