

## Khartoum's response will not eclipse the New Dawn Charter

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January 22, 2013 - The signing of the New Dawn Charter by the Sudanese Revolutionary Front (SRF), the National Consensus Forces (NCF), civil society, youth, women and student organisations drew strong reactions in the stagnant Sudanese politics. The Charter attracted substantial support and appreciation among opposition groups, coupled by hysteric response from the Khartoum government. Despite ample clarity on the matter, I think it is pertinent for me as a witness and a participant to the production of the Charter to contribute to the debate.

At the outset, it is useful to refer to the fundamentals behind drafting and signing the Charter:

1. There is no way out of the current misery in Sudan, threat to its unity and its very survival, leave alone a new dawn in the country, without immediate departure of the so-called "Government of National Salvation".
2. The current regime can be ousted either by popular uprising alone or combined with military work that offers protection and ensures a suitable environment for change. However, such a change cannot happen without unity of opposition forces; a common vision of an interim government; assuring the Sudanese people and the international community of a clear viable alternative to the current regime and: a safeguard that the country will not disintegrate or degenerate into chaos following the demise of the current regime.
3. Signing the New Dawn does not call for the signatories to abandon their original political programmes and visions for the country. The Charter has not melted all signatory parties into one organisation. Doing that will be akin to a search for the abhorred one-party module. The Charter simply identifies the common simple denominators for achieving democracy in the country while retaining autonomy of signatory groups.
4. While the Charter parties express their vision and hope for post-dictatorship Sudan, they know well that they cannot impose their programmes on the Sudanese people by force. The people of Sudan will be the final arbiter. They will determine the nature of democracy they like in an inclusive constitutional conference and through the programme they opt for in general free and fair elections.
5. The parties to the Charter are in firm agreement that reproduction of the same political system under new faces will not solve Sudan's problems. In their search for a better political system, the parties call for revision of the current state institutions and governance mechanisms. They also call for action-based unity of the country, away from empty slogans of today's politics.
6. The New Dawn Charter is not a biblical text. It is a product of committed work of its signatories, but remains open for debate, evolution and improvement.

Based on the above, let me turn to some points aired out within the vicious and hysteric response of the regime to the Charter:

1. The New Dawn Charter has not called for secularism and has no passage in the text that says so, except when words are twisted and over-burdened with superfluous meanings. The Charter calls for separation between state institutions and religious institutions and has phrased that in broad terms that allow further debate on the issue. However, the Charter forcefully calls for putting an end to political abuse of religion, a defining feature of the current regime and the result of that is obvious: genocides, war crimes, corruption, lack of fundamental freedoms, racism, blatant disregard to human rights, moral decadence, etc. The Khartoum junta should be the last to talk about Islam, let away defending it.
2. The Charter calls for dissolution of the National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS), but does not recommend disbanding of Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) or the police. Instead, the Charter calls for re-organization of SAF with integration of the Sudanese Revolutionary Front forces into it so that SAF can reflect the diversity of the Sudanese people. This is to ensure formation of a national army capable of protecting the country and its citizens instead of being a force dedicated for the protection of narrow based governments and dictatorships.
3. The Charter calls for inclusion of the issue of voluntary unity of all Sudanese people in the agenda of the envisaged constitutional conference. This is a base for a new social contract founded on justice and true federal system that operates within a united Sudan. It is to be noted that none of the participants in the Charter has called for self-determination, even though that is a legitimate right for all regions of Sudan. Those who betrayed our brethren in South Sudan and backtracked on their promise to give them the right of self governance within a Federal system of a united Sudan by raising the Slogan of "No Federation in One Nation" are partially responsible for the eventual separation of South Sudan. We want to assert this right as a departure from the old dictum that governed the relationship between the Centre and the peripheries. Those who agreed to give South Sudan the right of self-determination without consulting the people of Sudan have no moral grounds to deny any party the right to bring up the issue of self-determination for deliberation in a constitutional conference. Opting for unity by force will not create a united Sudan and is likely to lead to its disintegration.
4. The Charter calls for a federal system composed of eight regions, including Blue Nile and South Kordofan, and it seems the addition of the latter two regions that attracted lots of criticism. It is true that Blue Nile and South Kordofan did not feature as

regions in the administrative structure that we inherited from the colonial system. The same system, however, has undergone tremendous changes since independence. Furthermore, the formation of administrative units depends on many factors and the units do not have to be identical in either geographical or population sizes. There is also no reason to suppose that the current administrative structure is ideal. The CPA has already given unique status to Blue Nile and South Kordofan and with unforeseen ramifications. The Charter offers a federal system that allows these two regions to rule themselves within a broader federal system. Otherwise, these two regions might be forced into making unfavourable choices.

Finally, let me recap by stating the following:

- Sudan cannot be saved without toppling the current regime and the unity of opposition forces constitutes the shortest route to that end.
- The New Dawn Charter has gone along way in achieving its objectives. It has already ingested vigorous debate in the otherwise stagnant Sudanese political environment and frightened the regime into an unprecedented hysteria.
- The Charter is open for constructive debate and further improvement.
- Open and free dialogue remains the only way for the creation of an inclusive Sudan that can be a source of pride for all of its citizens.

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