



PEOPLE4SUDAN

People-to-people initiative to advance human rights through humanitarian action

Summary reflections from my travels in Africa (July-August 2014)

Mukesh Kapila

(Distribution: Public)

In a month-long trip (22 July-23 August), I visited Sudan (Nuba), South Sudan, Rwanda (Kigali), and Ethiopia (Addis Ababa).

This was a multi-agency sponsored *humanitarian and peace assessment* mission with a range of objectives made possible by the financial logistical, and other practical support of a range of partners:

*Aegis Trust
African Freedom Coalition
Darfur Relief and Documentation Centre
Jewish World Watch
Saxe Gothe Presbyterian Church
Waging Peace
+ A leading humanitarian NGO that wishes to remain anonymous*

Additional support for the South Sudan leg of the trip came from *Nonviolent PeaceForce* and the *University of Southern California/Shoah Foundation*. The Nuba part of the trip was facilitated by the *Nuba Relief, Rehabilitation, and Development Organisation (NRRDO)* and the *Sudan Relief and Rehabilitation Association (SRRA)*. My travel companions were Peter Moszynski (journalist) and Tim Freccia (film-maker).

The views presented in this report are my own responsibility.

Sudan (Nuba)

Travelling inside the Nuba Mountains and spending time in Yida allowed me to get a good first-hand update on the latest situation there. We visited a hospital, schools, villages, and refugee camps. Our talks included many Nuban people – displaced and refugees, their community and political leaders, and various local and international humanitarian organisations. Travel conditions were very tough amidst the rainy season that had turned the roads into rivers of mud: we were often marooned requiring tractors to extract our vehicle. The trip was deliberately timed for the difficult season as I wanted to see for myself the worst conditions faced by the long-suffering Nuban population. Along the way, we also experienced newly planted landmines. This was the handicraft of

the Khartoum regime, which continues to wage war against its own people in what is now a protracted ethnically-motivated campaign of “genocidal attrition”. Two of the places we visited were bombed by the Sudan Air Force soon after we left them: this was rather noteworthy as otherwise there has been a lull in aerial attacks in recent days: it was as if we ourselves were being deliberately targeted.

The outcome of this part of my trip – and the principal reason for undertaking it - was to make a humanitarian assessment at first hand, and to identify gaps and priorities – with particular emphasis on what the Nuban people themselves see as their priority needs.

Overall, and compared to my previous visit, it was noteworthy to see how the armed opposition - SPLM(N) with the SRF - have held on and expanded the territory under their control. Yes, there are great needs among the 800,000 people most at risk including about half this number who are internally displaced - after three years of the current phase of the conflict. But the people have learnt to cope and become more resilient. They must be supported, not by dumping *relief* on them but by taking a *developmental* approach to keep them healthy, strong, and stubborn – to continue the resistance against the genocidal Khartoum regime.

The key self-expressed needs of the Nubans were for education (at all levels), healthcare, and livelihood generation – including food security and basic infrastructure. The insecurity created by Khartoum does not mean that such longer-term investments cannot be made – given the resourcefulness of the people and even if, from time to time, some of these investments will be damaged or destroyed by Sudanese air bombardment. It is remarkable that refugee numbers, though increased to about 90,000 have not grown much more significantly. This shows that the Nubans prefer to stay on their own land. International assistance should be designed in such a way as to keep them there rather than to inadvertently help the ICC-indicted President Bashir’s efforts to starve and terrorise them away. **Thus smartly-designed assistance – given according to accepted humanitarian principles - to the Nuban people is an extremely important means to ensure that the Khartoum regime does not succeed in its genocidal intent.**

Meanwhile, the controversy over where the refugees should be located continues. The Nuban refugees appear determined to stay where they are in Yida while UNHCR would like them to relocate. The stated reasons for relocation are not convincing and the UN needs to be reminded that not registering new refugee arrivals or withholding assistance from them with the aim to coerce them to move is to be condemned in no uncertain terms as breach of humanitarian principles. I made these points to the UN Humanitarian Coordinator for South Sudan, Toby Lanzer when we met subsequently in Juba.

In conclusion, I came away from Nuba inspired and encouraged by the resourcefulness and determination of the people there. I shall be writing a separate blog on this. Meanwhile, we also did a lot of filming and a short film should be available in coming days that will, I hope, convey the spirit of the situation. Finally, a couple of local potential channels for assistance were also identified with whom People4Sudan (P4S) can form partnerships to get help to the most needy people. The capacity building of these local Nuban/Sudanese organisations will have to be part of any assistance we may provide to strengthen their ability to deliver.

South Sudan

This part of trip was focused on reviewing the work of Nonviolent PeaceForce (www.nonviolentpeaceforce.org) of which I am a Board director. We visited the UN-guarded Tongping POC (civilian protection centre), and other conflict areas with IDP populations in Bor and also in Minkaman across the Nile. We met with Toby Lanzer, the UNMISS Deputy Special Representative as well as with some of the UN peacekeeping contingents and other humanitarian organisations such as MSF, Samaritan's Purse, Norwegian People's Aid, and the IFRC (Red Cross Red Crescent). I also met with the Deputy Mayor of Juba and some youth leaders who had very useful insights. Also useful analysis was exchanged with the British and US Ambassadors.

It was particularly interesting to compare notes with Toby Lanzer on our respective experiences as UN Coordinators – ten years apart. It was heartening to see the progress that has been made thanks to a new generation of UN officials – starting at the very top. This reinforced my central thesis that it is individual accountability in leadership that matters. Such a comparison between the UN in Sudan 2003/04 when Darfur happened on my watch and the UN in South Sudan in 2013/2014 will be the subject of a separate article.

Overall, our discussions allowed us to develop a deeper understanding of what is going on in South Sudan in terms of both the politics, and the extremely brutal pattern of violence that is still occurring – including, for example, the "one month special campaign of rape" declared by one group against another in revenge for some perceived wrong done to them. The humanitarian situation in South Sudan (a "level 3 emergency") is reaching alarming proportions.

Immediate prospects look grim. Without tackling underlying causes and including justice and accountability as part of a comprehensive package, any peace efforts will flounder, sooner or later. While paper peace agreements can be signed at the top, peace is actually built from the bottom-up, community-by-community, and neighbourhood-by-neighbourhood. These efforts require very special leadership at all levels.

Khartoum's meddling in South Sudan matters including pursuing its own self-interest and sending arms has fuelled the conflict. More generally, there will be no sustainable solution for either Sudan or South Sudan until Bashir goes. The deteriorating situation in South Sudan makes life for the marginalised peoples in Darfur and the other three border areas in Sudan even worse. Thus it is also very important that though publicity around the South Sudan crisis is justified, this should not mean that Sudan's suffering people get even more forgotten.

I said this and other things (eg responding to questions on what South Sudan has to learn from Sudan's experience including the Darfur genocide) in the public talk around my book *Against A Tide Of Evil*, hosted by the University of Juba and the Dr John Garang Memorial University to which some 325 people came along with South Sudan TV and radio and other journalists. A whole new generation of Sudanese/South Sudanese is being born with only a hazy idea of the past and they could be doomed to repeat history unless they learn from it. I also gave various media interviews. Elements of what I said there have been reported already including in articles appearing in *Foreign Policy*.

NP is South Sudan's largest civilian-run protection organisation, and their non-partisan approach has earned them huge respect from all sides enabling them to gain access in most difficult areas. Of particular interest here is NP's methodology on *direct unarmed civilian protection (UCP)*. NP's unarmed civilian peacekeepers are at the frontlines of the civil war and have saved many lives through their direct presence and extraordinary courage. The UCP methodology is very effective in such situations as also in some other countries that they work in, such as the Philippines. (Unfortunately history shows that nonviolence does not work against genocidal dictators such as Bashir).

We also had some interesting discussions on holding a Juba Jazz and Lit Fest as a more positive inspiration for the future. Any takers to get this going?

Rwanda

The CEO of NP and I then went on to Rwanda for a short visit there, hosted by Aegis Trust of whom I am Special Representative). My programme included another well-attended public talk at the Kigali Genocide Memorial as well as discussions on the possibilities of NP/Aegis co-operation which would lead to expansion of Aegis into South Sudan and, of both into the Central African Republic so that they can transmit their experiences and set up educational and protection programmes there. Our stay in Kigali coincided with a visit from Rocky Dawuni (the Ghanaian/American musician and a popular reggae phenomenon: visit his website and listen to his "Hymns for a Rebel Soul"). He will be returning to Rwanda to do a concert there in 2015 and perhaps we can gain his interest for an Africa-wide programme whereby no African child will leave school without a basic awareness of genocide and mass atrocity prevention in the context of peace education that should be a core component of the school curriculum. Getting something like that going – in every African country is vital. Let us be clear: Africa will continue to spawn genocides unless one starts by educating and immunising its children against such evil, starting from a very young age.

We also discussed the prospects for an International Conference on "civilian protection" that has been proposed by some donors, in the aftermath of this year's 20th anniversary commemoration of the Rwanda genocide.

Addis Ababa

Starting with meetings with the EU and US missions to the African Union, the NP team and I called on the AU Peace and Security Commission staff leading to some useful insights into the AU's current thinking in relation to both South Sudan and Sudan. We discussed the function of the peacekeeping mission in South Sudan and the political and peacekeeping efforts in Sudan. In particular, it was interesting to discuss in confidence how the hybrid and much criticised UNAMID works: according to very senior people at the AU; this is only a hybrid mission because Bashir would not let in a UN mission and so AU provides a cover for the UN to be present as part of UNAMID. What this means is that real command and control of the Darfur mission is with the UN and not the AU, and it is the former that really decides on all policy and practice. Thus any criticisms (like the well publicised ones recently on UNAMID) should be directed at UN DPKO – who are ultimately accountable for the gross failures in Darfur.

There was great interest in NP ideas for a programme of cooperation with AU troop contributing countries in terms of training African military peacekeepers on civilian protection – something that is currently very lacking.

We also had a frank exchange of views on the credibility of the Mbeki-led political processes: privately senior AU officials appeared equally concerned and amongst many of them, there is real dismay at what the Bashir regime is doing – and the way this is shaming Africa. Overall I was pleased to see the progress being made at the AU. Despite its capacity issues and the attitudinal problems of some of its self-preserving leaders, there is a reform movement underway. There are probably better prospects on engaging with the AU than at UN HQ – in terms of seeing changes in attitude and practice which ultimately benefit the continent.

Some media coverage from the trip

[Interview: Prof. Kapila gives his insights on his experience on fighting mass atrocities and genocides](#)

[South Sudan's Coming Famine](#)

An extended preview of a documentary film on the South Sudan crisis called The Trial is available here: youtu.be/pvz8jihfG34