

**Sudan Hearing**  
**Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission**  
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**Introduction**

Chairman Wolf, Chairman McGovern, and other distinguished members of the Commission, I want to thank you for having me here today to testify on the situation in Sudan. I just returned from the Darfuri refugee camps in eastern Chad, and earlier this year traveled into rebel-controlled areas of the Nuba Mountains. I want to align myself with the observations of my colleagues testifying today about the intensifying human rights and humanitarian crisis facing the people of Sudan throughout large swathes of Darfur, South Kordofan and Blue Nile, as well as the political repression of all independent voices in the country by the government of Sudan. And lest we forget, the people of the disputed territory of Abyei remain largely displaced after the Khartoum government's population-clearing assaults there a little more than two years ago.

I will focus my testimony on how to enhance US policy to maximize the chances of comprehensive peace, democratic transformation, and real accountability in Sudan. Then I want to share for the written record a little of what I learned in the Chadian refugee camps about what is going on across the border in Darfur, and some of the dangers I saw unfolding during my earlier trip to the Nuba Mountains.

**Promoting Peace and Democracy**

U.S. policy toward Sudan has been stuck in neutral for some time, hamstrung by competing priorities surrounding humanitarian access, counter-terrorism cooperation, peace between Sudan and South Sudan, and human rights considerations. Ever since President Obama's successful diplomatic engagement in support of South Sudan's 2011 referendum, American policy towards neighboring Sudan has drifted, despite intensifying conflict inside that country. The U.S. has become predictable: issuing occasional condemning statements, offering incentives for better behavior, and undertaking diplomacy in support of Sudan/South Sudan peace, but not addressing the fundamental governance issues in Sudan that are the primary drivers of instability. This has created a growing sense of American irrelevance in Khartoum.

In order to again be in a position to make a difference in Sudan, the U.S. has to rebuild leverage that it has lost due to years of unfulfilled threats and promises. That means it is probably not the time to issue *more* threats and promises, more incentives for better behavior and unspecified warnings if things get worse (if they possibly could for millions of Sudanese).

Instead, the U.S. should spend its time constructing a new approach to Sudan. This should involve a much stronger diplomatic effort to secure a comprehensive, inclusive peace deal for

Sudan with democratic transformation at the center of such a deal. The current policy has no chance of producing such an outcome.

In order to promote real solutions, the U.S. will have to engage much more deeply with the armed and unarmed opposition in Sudan. Diplomatic contact and non-military support should be expanded to the Sudan Revolutionary Front (SRF), the National Consensus Forces (NCF), and genuine civil society representatives. These elements, which arguably represent the vast majority of Sudan's population, must be more united and better prepared to assist the eventual democratic transition that the Sudanese people continue to demand.

The U.S. can be helpful in this, even catalytic, by focusing expanded aid and diplomatic assets on a few core areas:

- 1) **Promoting Comprehensive Peace:** Khartoum's strategy of divide-and-rule is furthered every time the U.S. supports regional peace deals like the current Darfur initiative. The U.S. should work relentlessly to help construct one comprehensive peace process for all of Sudan. U.S. officials should meet with the SRF at a high level in Washington, recognizing the opposition coalition as the key to a peaceful transition. U.S. officials should urge the SRF to continue improving human rights record and support it to become more inclusive. This will better prepare the SRF to become the prime interlocutor with the government of Sudan in an AU-led comprehensive peace process that has yet to take shape in Sudan.
- 2) **Supporting Media Tools:** The opposition and civil society are at a severe disadvantage in Sudan in that they are unable to communicate their platforms and agendas – or even the truth about what is happening in the country – to the vast majority of the population because of the lack of independent radio and television venues. The regime has a monopoly of access to the media. As it has in other countries, the U.S. should assist opposition, civil society and Sudanese journalists in developing independent radio and television options.
- 3) **Assisting Democratic Governance:** During the North/South war, U.S. and other support to the rebel's capacity to deliver humanitarian aid and create civil administrative structures was catalytic to improved human rights performance and emergency aid delivery. In areas controlled by the rebels in Darfur, South Kordofan and Blue Nile, the U.S. should begin to support such civil administrative capacities, especially as they relate to the support for delivering life-saving relief supplies.
- 4) **Enhancing Coalition-Building:** The U.S. can help Sudanese efforts to build deeper partnerships and firmer agreements about what kind of political transition is necessary in their country. Enabling opportunities for the SRF to meet with political opposition and civil society elements more regularly with an aim to build a stronger coalition in support of peace and democracy would have a major impact on the parties involved.
- 5) **Building Institutional Capacities:** Significantly increasing U.S. government capacity-building support for the SRF, NCF, youth and civil society groups working for democratic change could also alter political calculations on the ground. Many youth in Sudan aspire to a different future but lack the capacity to make their voices heard. Increased access to social media networks, training workshops and platform-building assistance will

bolster reform-minded Sudanese as they seek to politically challenge the regime's rule and help prepare for a peaceful transition to democracy.

### **Janjaweed Unbound in Darfur**

The Janjaweed militias are back. The Sudanese government's notorious paramilitary force and favorite counterinsurgency instrument has unleashed several scorched-earth campaigns in 2013 that have ethnically cleansed communities off their land, displacing hundreds of thousands of Darfuris. Fueled by complex economic and security agendas, Khartoum's alliance with and support for these militias has led to a comeback of infamous Janjaweed leader Ali Kosheib, already indicted for war crimes by the International Criminal Court. Kosheib's forces are torching villages and targeting civilians again on the basis of their identity.

This time, though, there are no witnesses. The regime in Khartoum is systematically denying access to journalists, aid workers, and U.N. peacekeepers, so the killing, looting, and burning occur in total silence. According to recently arrived Darfuri refugees that my colleague Omer Ismail and I interviewed in Chad in May, ICC indictee Ali Kosheib is entering villages himself with truckloads of Janjaweed militia killing and torturing civilians in order to clear the resource rich lands of their inhabitants.

Diplomats and news reports have peddled a very different narrative over the past year. U.N. and other officials have insisted that the Darfur civil war is largely over and peace would come if the main rebel groups would sign existing deals. Media reports have largely focused on "inter-tribal" conflict or fighting among rebel groups. Even Wikipedia lists Ali Kosheib as a "former" Janjaweed commander. These story lines couldn't be further from the truth.

Darfur's large scale violence is systematic, state-sponsored, and driven by three objectives. First, in North Darfur, Khartoum-backed Janjaweed militias strategically cleared local Arab and non-Arab populations from the areas around newly discovered gold mines in order to consolidate government control of rapidly expanding gold exports, critical in replacing lost oil revenue after South Sudan's independence in 2011. Second, in Central Darfur, some of the most productive land in Sudan is being cleared of its inhabitants by Ali Kosheib's forces in order to expand the territory offered to favored ethnic groups or sell to Gulf investors. Third, expanded Janjaweed looting and extortion schemes as well as smuggling networks for gum arabic (used in soft drinks and candies) are encouraged by the Khartoum regime as part of militia compensation.

### **More of the Same in the Nuba Mountains and Blue Nile**

The assault on the people of the Nuba Mountains and Blue Nile, two regions on the Sudan side of the border with South Sudan, bears a deadly resemblance to the tactics the Sudan government has used in Darfur and South Sudan. Aerial bombing terrorizes the population and prevents them from farming, while humanitarian groups are prevented from delivering aid. Starvation is the objective. Draining the water – the people – to catch the fish – the rebels – is one of the oldest counter-insurgency strategies known to man.

Speaking of Sudanese President Omer al-Bashir, one displaced man who we met in the Nuba Mountains asked, “A man who kills women and children with planes, is this a man who wants peace?”

Given the lack of progress toward peace, attitudes are hardening in rebel zones throughout Sudan, increasing the potential for the disintegration of the Sudanese state. “If things don’t change,” proclaimed one Nuba Mountains’ community leader we met, echoing many others, “then we want these 99 mountains to become our own country like South Sudan.” The longer the interlocking civil wars rage, the harder it will become to put this secessionist genie back in the bottle.

### **Ensuring Against another Mali or Somalia**

As the death tolls and reneged promises mount, however, it is becoming clear that no peace is possible without profound political change in Khartoum. A core long-term U.S. interest in this region should be to insure against another Mali or Somalia and their routes to state collapse, balkanization and radicalism. Sudan’s government has a history of cooperation with terrorist groups, and cooperation with Iran seems to be deepening again. The periphery of Sudan has been disintegrating over time, and that trend will only accelerate. The root driver of this ongoing and deepening crisis is unaccountable, unrepresentative, authoritative governance. The international response isn’t working, so new ideas and approaches are urgently needed.

Great sacrifices are being made by Sudanese pro-democracy, peace and human rights advocates. Rebel groups are clamoring for a genuinely comprehensive peace process. The U.S. and other countries have for years encouraged these movements to come together and spell out the terms of what a future democratic system could look like. At the beginning of this year a broad array of groups answered the challenge and signed a painstakingly negotiated “New Dawn Charter,” which began to put meat on the bones of what an inclusive Sudanese future could look like. That is just one of the first steps that opposition and civil society must take to position themselves to assist in a peaceful transition on Sudan.

### **Conclusion**

The final lesson is that the political constituency for peace in Sudan matters. Members of Congress, student organizations, faith-based groups, human rights advocates, celebrities, and others comprising the anti-genocide movement have put Sudan’s plight on the mattering map of the U.S. government over three presidencies. Great bipartisan effort has been expended in ending the north-south war, providing life-saving humanitarian aid to millions of Darfuris, and supporting the creation of the world’s newest state in South Sudan. Another great populist push is needed for Sudan. Its people still suffer, but they are coming together in support of a better future. We should stand with them.