

**Sudan: Al-Turabi on Election Victory, Role of Islam**

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(Interview with Dr. Hasan 'Abdallah al-Turabi, secretary general of the Islamic People's Congress, by Imam Ahmad Imam in Khartoum; date not given)

(FBIS Translated Text) (Imam) What does your victory in the elections to the federal National Assembly mean?

(Al-Turabi) Our political ethics do not permit us to gloat over and rejoice at our victory. Membership of the Assembly is in fact a trust laid upon one's shoulders to make a contribution to the council of deputies. The federal regime in a country like Sudan seeks to draw up its own constitution through referendums, to crystallize its model of political, economic, and social systems, to consolidate national unity, and to actively play its role in the world.

(Imam) Will you accept nomination for the chairmanship of the federal National Assembly?

(Al-Turabi) If I am pressed by the brother deputies to assume chairmanship of the Assembly's sessions, then I may accept such a trust. However, I can perform my role in the Assembly in any position whatsoever, be it as chairman of the Assembly, as a committee chairman, or as a member of the Assembly.

I confess that a number of my brother colleagues and my students in the field of law, who are now in authority, have raised with me the question of contributing to the work of the Assembly with my legal experience in the fields of local government systems, the development of federal rule, and constitutional decree No. 13 which laid down the executive and legislative system in the country and introduced various models of other constitutional systems.

(Imam) Why did you reject nomination for the presidency of the republic and accept nomination for membership of the federal National Assembly in the geographical constituencies elections?

(Al-Turabi) It has become a novelty in the Sudanese political arena these days that no one, however qualified, will nominate himself, even though deep in his heart he would

like to be in the Assembly so that he could express his views, which nobody else would express for him. As far as I am concerned, I am not like that. I do not say I am too old, but in view of the population structure and ages of people in Sudan, I feel that now that I am over 60, there are many generations who could play their part. For this reason, I am not keen on assuming any executive post.

But due to pressure from some citizens, who asked me to contribute my political and legal views and experience to the enrichment of public life in Sudan by joining the Assembly where the various views of the Sudanese people's representatives from all parts of Sudan interact, I agreed in response to their wishes to participate in the parliamentary elections. Furthermore, I accepted nomination for the parliament so that I can contribute my views openly from a public platform which the entire public opinion watches, and also so as to participate in a historical change, renovation, and cultural revival plan that concerns not Sudan alone but the entire Islamic world on the basis that it is a distinguished and serious attempt to restore the relationship between religion and politics without infringing public freedoms.

The Islamic movement in Sudan has excelled many Islamic movements. Its membership has grown and it has opened up to the elderly, young people, and women of Sudan.

Its objectives in life have also grown in terms of faith, rites, and worship. It has also returned politics to the sphere of religion and returned culture, art, and science to religion so that it becomes a cultural religion, so embracing all aspects of life. I would say that religious manifestations are now evident in all walks of life in Sudan. For this reason, it is necessary to actively participate in turning all this into an asset for Sudan's cultural development plan as well as in plans for construction and development of conditions in various fields through bestowing a touch of religion on all things.

This is a cultural movement whose manifestations will be reflected in all aspects of life in Sudan.

(Imam) The elections have resulted in the victory of the candidates of the National Islamic Front, which indicates the absence of other political currents. What would you say about that?

(Al-Turabi) A large number of representatives of Islamic forces have won seats in the National Assembly elections, and this indicates Sudan's emergence in the world and its occupation of a place among the community of nations. The currents that are absent were either currents that refused to accept the challenge and consequently did not contest the elections or put themselves to the test by the people, or their

representatives did not achieve victory as the Islamic forces representatives have done.

This, however, does not mean that there are no forces other than Islamic forces in the Assembly. The Assembly is a large receptacle that contains representatives of all the national forces chosen by the people in direct and free elections.

(Imam) Some say that the Sudanese Islamic experiment in power has failed as it did not bring about the desired Islamic change in society's movement... What is your evaluation of this experiment's development during the past six years?

(Al-Turabi) Firstly, it is the wisdom of the Sudanese people to realize that this was not the picture of a political change, but is to be found in a comprehensive movement of life and Islam. On the level of development and movements which act in the name of the revolution, it is so. But on the road of social change its effects can be seen in political, social, and economic life as well as in the specific conditions of the country concerned. And this is what lies behind individual features. It seems that some people present this movement as though it was one of an entire society irrespective of how some people try to express or lead aspects of life or instigate its tributaries to tackle Islamic change in Sudan.

Quite often, revolutions drive campaigns that are aimed at changing the old, toward something more closely approaching the destruction of the wrong. So if changes take place that bring a substitute for it in life, it is forced to resort to force or keep returning until it possesses the constants for revolutionary change, in other words, the comprehensive change of all walks of life, and change for advancement. I do not say that it advances regularly in life. But whatever comes to you from life, you look at it.

Furthermore, it moves in tandem with movement toward other aspects.

Some people see nothing other than a historical dimension in what is before them. When they move away from it, though, they soon realize that the historical aspect has henceforth disappeared. Some people are attracted by daily events. But this is what happens in Sudan. (preceding three paragraphs are as published) New events are taking place that fall within the framework of a social change movement in Sudan. In view of this, we are not in a hurry about bringing about an Islamic change in the Sudanese people's movement but rather are anxious that this change should come gently and gradually and should cover all sectors of society.

(Imam) You are being accused of trying to repeat or copy the Khomeyni-ite experience of Iran in Sudan. It is also being said that you continue to be influenced by the Khomeyni-ite complex and aspire to be the Khomeyni of Sudan.

How do you reply to these charges?

(Al-Turabi) It is true that the Khomeyni revolution in Iran is a movement of religious strife and Islam in a country that was dominated by people who wanted Iran to be guided in its march by the ancient Persian tradition and modern European methods. They wanted to borrow from the pre-Islamic era that reigned in Persia. This led to the rise of a religious tendency. What happened in Iran was a revolution by any standards. It was a revolution that affected all parts of the world, because people knew that it was connected with principles and slogans. Even after its triumph it will remain for a long time to come, reacting with these slogans and principles, though it might not tailor these principles and slogans to methods and programs in the field of real life. This provides a clear difference between the movement in Sudan and the movement in Iran, for anyone capable of discerning.

Secondly, the Iranian movement, naturally, took place in a Persian country and a Persian environment. Even in matters of religion, the Iranian revolution adopted the way of one specific sect, Shiism. For this reason, it sought to protect itself within Tehran and from there to spread its influence and extend its arms to outside. But by its nature Sudan is open and does not get excited over any bigotry on behalf of any creed or sect. Sudan is not motivated by any national or regional fanaticism, as it has a more secular outlook.

Thirdly, the Islamic movement in Iran was more besieged due to the blackout that was imposed on it and its remoteness from the sources vested in men of religion bearing all sorts of religious titles, who were the ones that liberated all aspects of life in their country.

But as to Sudan, it is an open country and belongs to the faction that concentrated on developing its own internal organization; consequently it was only natural to include leaderships that did not attempt to monopolize the movement's initiatives but rather interacted with all the other various aspects. As I have said, Sudan is too big for Islam to ignore.

Furthermore, the political field in Sudan is wide whether in terms of the system of government, the relationship between the subjects and the rulers, or the relations that exist in a country with such a multitude of origins.

The same applies to the economic field. Sudan was a backward, lost, and hungry country, yet it followed economic systems which embodied some fairness in economic relations among the people.

In Sudan, change is taking place in the government system, the economic system, the education system, arts, and the whole of society. Religion here enjoys a more comprehensive position. The renovation of religion in Sudan has a wider effect, whereas in Iran it does not undermine the position of the specific leadership.

We know a great deal about the West. We know much about their religion but they do not know much about our religion. We know about their religion because this is part of the tradition of our Ibrahimite (Abrahamite) religion.

We also know their languages and their history but they know very little about our language and our history. Because of this, they note some aspects of similarity in the way of life here or there, they relate them to each other, and they connect them together in a manner that goes beyond all reality.

(Imam) People also accuse you of supporting extremist movements in the Arab and Islamic arena, citing as proof your defense of Islamic groups that oppose their governments and your refusal to condemn acts of armed violence committed by these groups. What do you say to that?

(Al-Turabi) Through religion, we know that life has smooth, straightforward, and moderate aspects as well as extremist and fanatical aspects. This is a human phenomenon which also has manifestations in religion, such as the emergence of a certain creed. You may find that the believers of this creed take an extremist and fanatical attitude toward it. Take also the example of socialism.

Those who take an extremist and fanatical attitude about their socialism tend to take a leftist attitude unlike that (of socialism) in Europe.

Even nationalism is a Western theory. Some of its protagonists take extremist attitudes, show hatred toward everything foreign, and try to destroy everything foreign, as is happening now in Europe at the hands of some of the nationalist extremist parties and groups. All these are human phenomena. We do not deny that Muslims practice them too.

Islam has inherited faiths and creeds through its historical relations with Europe. Some people use the terminology and expression of these faiths and creeds to express even madness and irrationality. Hence it is not true to say that Sudan defends these movements that are far away from it. All the prophets came to renew the religion of God Almighty and called on all people to act fairly and not to do injustice to anyone else. But if someone acts in a manner that provokes those around him, history will act, but not in favor of the new Western manifestations which turn against people and try to drive them from their homes.

Thus religion permits one to reply to an argument with an argument, but nothing else. However, if one person assaults another, then this other must return the assault, though he should never go to excess in his response to aggression nor be the one to start the aggression.

Naturally, some movements tend to embark on aggression and extremism. But religious jurisprudence does not permit fanaticism. Islam calls for tolerance, and if anyone comes to argue with us we argue with him and respond to his arguments with arguments of our own. But if he were to commit aggression against us, then he would be the one who started the aggression, so we then have the choice of either forgiving him if this would do any good, or defending ourselves so that he may not uproot our religion.

This is one of the manifestations of adherence to religion which should be practiced as long as it is confined to defense and struggle to uphold right and religion.

Even in West Europe we see revolutions destroy constitutional legitimacy, such as has happened in Britain, France, Russia, and elsewhere, no matter how hard the old system tries to oppose the new system and even if this latter tries to establish itself gradually and gently. The old guard, out of their care for their own interests and whims, try to annihilate the new system in its cradle. This theory is well known in all political sciences.

If the Westerners like a movement, they call it a resistance movement. If they like its triumph, they call it revolution. But if they do not like it at all, then they call it terrorism and call it all sorts of names. This is the way they deal with the Islamic movements. Naturally, Westerners have their own whims and they base their criteria on them. But these criteria are scientifically broad even in their underlying theories. For this reason, I defend these movements if they are oppressed or wronged, or if attempts have been made to force them away from their religions. But likewise, I criticize these movements and try to counsel them if their religious fervor prompts them to become fanatics or extremist in fighting others with blows or even with excessive verbal abuse such as calling them agnostic. Such phenomena have existed throughout the history of Islamic movements, though they now appear as something new.

Driven by the fervor of youth, when they are in their adolescent years, young men tend to want to keep themselves independent of their families and they might even go as far as fighting their fathers or mothers, as is known. On the other hand, their fathers and mothers continue to see them as babies in cradles. This has always been one of the tenets of life and a law of evolution.

In fact, all new things suffer from the calamities of adolescence. But right demands that we try to be close to God Almighty, to worship Him, to learn from the history of mankind, and also to be fair.

The people we talk with in most cases are trying to organize a dialogue between the ruler who wants to suppress what is new, and the subjects who want to change conditions, sometimes resorting to force. Just as I do not want to see the energies of the Islamic world depleted in a head-on clash between rulers and subjects, and between those in power and those they govern, I do not want to see it depleted in a horizontal struggle between one country and another.

We always try to be mediators to bring two sides together and close the ranks of Muslim society. Thus society's progress should be gradual and gentle allowing everyone to contribute his ideas, for he might find others' ideas good. But should he find what the other side says to be odd, then he should keep silent and address himself to the good ideas. This is what man should always endeavor to do.

But we criticize the West because they turn criteria upside down. They seek democracy for themselves and anarchy in all its forms and expressions for the Islamic world. If they find that democracy is leading to Islam, they immediately abort it. They seek human rights in accordance with their own criteria and they try to impose them on public life in the Islamic world. But as soon as they note that that might lead to greater freedom for Islam, they oppose it and trample on human rights. They support the language of nationalism and independence, but when the nation's will begins to move toward Islamic laws, which are remote from their man-made laws, they naturally consider that to be backwardness that should be halted by any means or method.

They view things from the perspective of their experience with the Christian religion. Naturally, in their countries they had religious conflicts that were coupled with ailments, with which they interacted on a large scale, ending with the removal of religion from most aspects of life. So they want anyone with religion, in the post-Islamic age, to deal with religion in the way they dealt with it. Thus they have forgotten why God created people: "I have only created jinnis and men that they may serve Me." (Koranic verse). Why God granted them freedom of opinion: "The truth comes from your Lord. Let him who will, believe, and let him who will, reject." (Koranic verse). Why do they then rally against our language and against our criteria, as they are doing now?

(Imam) Sudan has suffered from religious extremism and bigotry. Some movements have gone to the extent of shedding the blood of innocent people as happened at Ansar al-Sunnah Mosque, which is situated in the Revolution quarter of Omdurman,

and as happened also in a village near Wad Madani in al-Jazirah province at the beginning of this year at the hands of the Repudiation and Denunciation Group.... Do not these incidents make it imperative for Sudan to be cautious in its dealings with matters of extremism and fanaticism? What would you say to that?

(Al-Turabi) Extremism and fanaticism are among the ailments of religion, as I have previously said. The ailment of fanaticism has also befallen the West in respect of some aspects of their piety, so much so that the formalities of worship came to replace the entire religion, even if these formalities were devoid of the intention to worship God.

This state of affairs led to the revolt of the famous reformation in Europe, and the Protestant factions split away, influenced by Islam. Indeed, the church there has monopolized the relationship between the servant and his God. Likewise, we Muslims also had in our Islamic history factions that attached much significance to outward manifestations and words, and that stuck to them fanatically, to the extent that anyone who disagreed with them on one word would be cast out. Some also show fanaticism in their adherence to the tenet of al-Batiniyah (a school of thought in Islam, characterized by divining a hidden meaning in the revealed texts), on the grounds that religion must have its hidden secrets which unite the apparent and the hidden, and without which there can be no good in any deed. In my opinion, this is nothing but hypocrisy. Yet there are some who fanatically adhere to al- Batiniyah and feel that they can dispense even with religion in their dealings with other people in real

But as their history shows, the people of Sudan are generally more moderate. Religion came to them through Sufism. People did not carry their adherence to al- Batiniyah to extremes despite the fact that the Islam that entered their country was that of Sufism. Islam did not enter Sudan to try to impose its laws, jurisprudence, and motives, as it did in many other countries. Even when Islam came into power in the days of the al-Zarqa Sultanate, for example, it did not alienate itself and embark on repudiating people. They did not consider all those who agreed with them to be believers and those who did not agree with them to be infidels, though a tendency toward such a thing manifested itself during the days of the Mahdi rule, because that was a revolution against imperialism. So vigor in fighting was coupled with vigor in feeling that those who were not on their side were not of their religion at all.

The Sudanese people are not known to be too fanatical about religious sectarianism, for they are Sunnis and so they do not act with extremism and bigotry. In their religious jurisprudence, they follow the Maliki creed. But even in their jurisprudence they do not resort to bigotry and sometimes they take up other terminologies, as is the case in Sufism. But for the most part they are open to each other, even in nationalist matters.



Sudan is not influenced by any Arab, African, or regional nationalism, because the Sudanese are open to their neighbors and to those around them. But I do not say that the ailments that afflict mankind do not afflict them. For such ailments have come to Sudan though in a very light manner. Sometimes, when people have personal jealousies, they try to express them in religious terms.

The recent movement you mentioned in your question was apparently a movement initiated by some fanatical old people, but was later championed by adolescents. Adolescents are always easily swayed to the left or to the right and to adherence to religion. They become fanatical about any movement whatsoever. This is a law of life, but it progresses through man.

Religious freedom exists in Sudan, though occasionally you find some strong manifestations of fanaticism on the part of one side or another. But the important thing is that people should read the history of Islam and thus see how it marches along the right course and how Muslims have deviated left and right. Preventive medicine should be found to deal with such a phenomenon before it becomes entrenched, so that once we detect symptoms of the disease, we will rush to treat it, and all this will cost us nothing but emergency medicine. Whereas if we ignore the symptoms, then the disease will intensify and we will then be forced to take stronger measures to deal with it. Thus treatment of ailments before they become entrenched is in fact easier.

From a historical point of view, the median world ('Alam al-Wasat) was the cradle of civilizations and religions and the means through which Islam entered Europe.

It constituted a great power that protected Africa from colonialism thus forcing this colonialism to enter the African continent through its southern parts and then creep up to the Middle East leading to the Wars of the Crusades and the Zionist attempts to usurp Palestine; religion suffered a blow which led to its complete removal from the public life. Perhaps all these factors led to the manifestation of extremism and fanaticism here.

Though religion was removed from public life, it continued to enjoy people's love in their private lives, although they did not perform all aspects of worship. But they adhere to and uphold all traces of religion throughout their lives. This is the way God has made people and it cannot be changed by anyone.

Westerners believe that through their striking at the Orient, history has come to an end. Some Western thinkers said that history will end with the placing of the West at the top of the world, and so they want it to remain at the apex of the pyramid until the end of time. Naturally, the Westerners want to maintain their rule for eternity. But Islam's rise, and its shaking off the dust around it, has completely perplexed them and

upset their plans. Anyway, there are numerous reasons for the spread of fanaticism and extremism in our region. It is the duty of us all to eliminate the causes of this ailment and to treat the root of the problem before it gets entrenched further and thus renders treatment harder.

Some Westerners might feel that it would be better to pit the Muslims against each other, so that they cannot rally all their power and move against the West. But they should be wiser, because if Islam were to muster power and rise to repel aggression, it would bring about a great deal of change in its relationship with them. They ought to remember that the influence of the French Revolution did not remain confined to France, but spread to the rest of Europe.

Hence it is better for them to gradually and gently open the road before Islam so that the Muslims may decide their destinies as they wish. All parts of the world have now become closer to each other. We in the Islamic People's Congress try to act in a spirit of moderation and reconciliation among the brothers as has been the case in Afghanistan, Somalia, Algeria, the Palestine Authority, the Hamas Movement, and so forth.

Following Iraq's entry into Kuwait, we led Islamic missions that visited all the capitals concerned to demand that Iraq should withdraw from its aggression so that we would not become embroiled in situations of tension which would harm us all. We visited all the capitals concerned in this spirit, but our efforts failed to meet with success.

Even in Yemen, we tried to mediate between Sanaa and Aden in an attempt to narrow differences and reconcile their relations in order to prevent the flare-up of war. What happened as a result of this is well known.

A while ago, I went to Egypt and met with its president to talk to him about reconciliation within the Islamic movement. In Algeria too, we tried to mediate between the government and the Islamic Salvation Front, and here too we failed and were forced to use our relations with France for the purpose, thereby succeeding in holding a meeting of the two sides in the presence of France and the Islamic People's Congress. These reconciliatory efforts almost succeeded, but forces that were provoked by these efforts rushed to frustrate them. For there are forces in Algeria that do not want any recourse to either Arabism or Islam in Algeria. They want Algeria to remain a slave of France and a country in which the Arabic language and religion are held in contempt. France was preoccupied at the time with its election battle.

As to our mediation efforts between the Palestine Authority and Hamas, they fall within the framework of our efforts to eliminate tension between the two sides. Old relations exist between me and Yasir 'Arafat going back to the 1950s, and perhaps not

only with him but with many of the strugglers who were killed by the Zionist terrorism in Tunisia, Lebanon, and elsewhere. Likewise, I have relations with the leaders of Hamas, which is a relatively new movement. Indeed, we brought representatives of both sides together here and they agreed on a charter that would regulate relations between them. But everything collapsed because the Oslo process was working behind their backs.

Once more, we warned them not to let the media cameras turn their lenses on internecine fighting among the Palestinians so that the limited energies of the Palestinians would not be squandered in a useless conflict. We convinced them of the need to return once more to the negotiating table.

We do not consider our actions to be interference, because if a third party intervenes between two sides with the purpose of reconciling or mediating between the two sides, they do not consider it to be a foreign party that has committed aggression against them. For it is a party prompted by good will for all. Naturally, it leaves them free will.

Third parties are now coming to us to create differences between us. They do not want us to meet other than within the framework they lay for us. But reconciliation is a duty of all Muslims and should not be prevented by anything at all. In matters of reconciliation things that are not permitted in ordinary matters are allowed to take place, because reconciliation is an objective to be sought and the measures taken in achieving it might go beyond what is permissible in other matters.

(Imam) Sudan is accused of sheltering Hamas activists, among the charges made against it of harboring terrorists. What is your answer to these accusations?

(Al-Turabi) Firstly: Those who level these accusations always depend on rumors about so-called terrorists in the world, but nobody knows where those terrorists reside. So they point accusing fingers at Sudan so that all suspicions in the world are placed at its door.

Secondly: Perhaps they mean to blame Sudan for all Muslim activists as was the case with Engineer Yahya 'Ayyash so that he and those around him think that they are being looked for in far away places, giving them a false sense of security so that they act with less caution. Undoubtedly, the rumors they spread about the presence of 'Ayyash in Sudan were nothing but camouflage to cover their plots and lay a snare for him to catch him where he was. They are constantly aware that a Palestinian presence in their own territory is much better than a Palestinian presence in Sudan. But they always like to lay all rumors or suspicions about terrorism at Sudan's door. I do not mean by this that this directed campaign of rumors harms Sudan. At the beginning,

one detests such accusations and rejects them, but then one realizes that when God wants to revive a virtue that has been overlooked, He picks a spiteful person to talk about it. Thanks to these false accusations, Sudan has become more famous

We know that a number of Western journalists have begun to read the Holy Koran and the Holy Koran is being translated into their languages. They want to know the basis of this phenomenon which they fear, so that they try to run away from it. God fills the hearts of the infidels with panic. God makes us fear some insects whose poison does not kill anyone, yet man continues to fear them until they disappear into their holes.

(Imam) Those who care about Sudan are worried because of the diminishing chances for national reconciliation following the completion of the presidential and parliament election measures. Do you share these people's concern or are you optimistic about the continuation of the reconciliatory efforts?

(Al-Turabi) The Sudanese National Assembly, whose establishment was completed at the beginning of this year, represents the various tributaries of the people's will, embracing all functions of life and all vocations and all the national Sudanese forces. It embraces all forces of whatever affiliation. This is the greatest reconciliation.

Reconciliation in history is not something between any specific person and another, for history is not moved by individuals.

What is happening in Sudan at present engulfs the entire Sudanese life. Religion was not confined to one prophet, particularly as far as we Muslims are concerned.

Even our Prophet, May God bless his soul and grant him grace, as soon as al-Madinah's construction was completed and its economic, scientific, and political structures were put in place, he bid it farewell and died.

This is the reconciliation that man should take into consideration in looking at history. God created the world to try people. The whole of history until our present times has been moved by others. For this reason, we must not look for individuals, for history forgets them. The struggle in the West is between one party and another and not between individuals.

Natural reconciliation essentially does not permit any one social force to let its whims, private interests, and affiliations rule its relations with others, thus transforming the relation in its entirety into conflicts between a victor and a vanquished and between a majority and a minority.

This is the case in the West, where the conflict is a conflict between the rich classes and the poor classes, betweenBut we, we are a nation of unity. Reconciliation is the root of our faith. The closer we, poor and rich alike, get to God, and irrespective of how remote we might be from each other, the closer we get to the brothers, and no matter how different our views might be, we bridge them through consultations and counseling. When we meet, our hearts feel happy. We call the result of consultations a unanimity and not a majority opinion. This is the phenomenon which we should build upon in Sudan as a sound means for reconciliation. But if we were to ignore the entire Sudanese people and look to individuals to reconcile them, then we would be talking to people who are closer to each other and who constitute the majority of the Sudanese.

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