

Sudan: Government Spokesman Comments on Interim Period, National Unity Government

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Interview with Sayyid al-Khatib, spokesman for the Sudanese Government team negotiating with the SPLM, by Muhammad Sa'id al-Hasan, from Khartoum: "Official Spokesman of Sudanese Government Delegation to Al-Sharq al-Awsat: 'Devil of Details' Raised Its Head Many Times During Negotiations"

(FBIS Translated Text)

In an interview with Al-Sharq al-Awsat, Sayyid al-Khatib, the official spokesman of the Sudanese Government team negotiating with the delegation of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) at the Sudanese peace talks in Nivasha in Kenya, revealed the motives of the government rejection to negotiate over the three regions - the Nubah Mountains, the Southern Blue Nile, and Abiye -- "despite the fact that IGAD (Inter-Governmental Authority on Development) had nothing to do with this."

Al-Khatib said that the two sides, the government and the SPLM, agreed to transform the peace agreement from a bilateral to a national one. This would be established by forming a national unity government with the participation of the opposition parties; the national unity government also would participate in revising the constitution in the light of what was reached in the peace agreement.

The official spokesman expected the preparatory period for the peace agreement to start in July 2004, and the period of the interim government -- 6 years -- specified by the peace agreement to commence at the beginning of 2005; he also expected that the understanding between the government and SPLM delegations would lead to some kind of political partnership between the two sides.

(Al-Hasan) What are the most important landmarks in the peace agreement negotiations between the government and the SPLM delegations?

(Al-Khatib) The first landmark that gave us hope in achieving peace was the signing of the Machakos agreement on 20 July 2002. This agreement was considered a real opportunity towards the peace agreement. The second landmark was Nakoro in May 2003. It was considered a negative landmark, because it was tantamount to a warning,

and it made the failure of the negotiations a possibility. The third landmark was when First Vice President Uthman Muhammad Taha and SPLM Leader John Garang exercised their personal and political weight in the negotiations; this led to signing the security and military arrangements agreement in Nivasha on 30 September 2003. The fourth landmark was the agreement on the division of wealth in Nivasha; this in its turn led to the fifth and final landmark related to the ratio of sharing authority, which crowned the efforts to achieve the final agreement.

(Al-Hasan) Who was behind the initiative of First Vice President Taha and SPLM Leader Garang, attending Nivasha to lead the process of negotiations?

(Al-Khatib) In fact the initiative of having the Nivasha negotiations conducted by the first vice president and the SPLM leader came from a third party, which was Kenya. The initiative was greatly supported by the mediators and observers, especially after the collapse of the Nakoro negotiations. At that time there was a belief that the negotiations needed momentum and continuity, a matter that could not be achieved except by raising the level of representation; this was because the negotiations were in the stage of decisions.

(Al-Hasan) Since the signing of the Machakos agreement, when did the "devil" of details raise its head?

(Al-Khatib) The "devil" of details raised its head many times during these negotiations. Let me say that these negotiations, and the agreement, are among the most detailed ones. This is not always necessarily a good thing. The agreements ought to be general, and include the general principles, bases, and criteria. Moreover, because of the lack of trust, the negotiating side, for example the SPLM, insisted on discussing the details, a matter that caused some problems. In the security and military arrangements agreement, for instance, there was no need to get into details, such as the numbers of the participating troops, the positions of deployment of the units, and other issues; the experts should handle these issues. In the division of wealth, an agreement was reached to form a commission to manage the oil resources; this did not mean getting into the details of the work of this commission and its structure. In the issue of the two regions, the Nubah Mountains and the Blue Nile, there were many details that should have been left for the elected councils of each province so that they would be settled by the sons of the province themselves.

(Al-Hasan) What is the aim of the official signing of the peace agreement in Nairobi after the signing of the authority sharing protocols?

(Al-Khatib) This official signing is vital and necessary. It must be done so that the world participates and becomes a witness to this agreement. The international role is

extremely important for the post-signing period. The Kenyan president will attend it, and many countries will participate in it at a senior level.

(Al-Hasan) How could the agreement be transformed from a bilateral to a national one?

(Al-Khatib) It is important for the others to find themselves in this agreement. Therefore, the government and the SPLM agreed to the establishment of a national unity government with the participation of the opposition parties. We agreed to revise the constitution in light of the agreement. The others (the opposition) will participate in this revision in order to give their opinion of the agreement and how to include it in the constitution. The important thing is to agree to holding free and internationally monitored general elections that would give everybody the right to participate and to form the government during the rest of the interim period.

(Al-Hasan) When does the interim period start?

(Al-Khatib) It will start as soon as the final signing of the peace agreement is completed; this would be after concluding the two remaining issues, the ceasefire agreement and the way to implement the agreement. As soon as this happens, the preparatory period -- one year -- will commence, and after it the interim period commences. If an agreement on the two issues were concluded, then I would expect the preparatory period to commence in July 2004, and the interim period at the beginning of 2005.

(Al-Hasan) Were there consultations between the government and the SPLM about political partnership?

(Al-Khatib) I expect the understanding that prevailed during the negotiations to lead to some kind of political partnership at various levels. There is a minimum level, to which whether willingly or reluctantly we are committed; it is the level of administering the agreement during the interim period. This might lead to partnership at a higher level. When we face challenges, such as good management and not just mere management, then it would be imperative to have some kind of coordination in order to avoid problems. We hope to achieve this level of good management during the interim period in order to achieve unity, and this would lead to higher levels of coordination and dealings.

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