

Sudan's Vice President Discusses Government's Darfur Plan, Ties With EU, US Interview With Sudanese First Vice President Ali Uthman Muhammad Taha by Abdallah Mustafa in Brussels; date not given: "'Those Who Allege That Peace Agreement Has Put South on Verge of Secession Are Like Those Who See Glass Half Empty,' Says Sudanese First Vice President"

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In an interview with, Sudan's first vice president, Ali Uthman Muhammad Taha, defended the Sudanese peace agreement he signed with SPLA (Sudan People's Liberation Army) leader Dr John Garang on 9 January. He said: "Those who believe that the agreement could not last did not read its provisions very well." He indicated that the document, which put an end to approximately 22 years of fighting in the south, was "clear, unequivocal, and convincing." He continued: "The criteria used in the distribution of resources and power were objective, based on the dimension of the province in terms of population."

Taha added in his interview with that "those who spread the allegation that the agreement had put the south on the verge of 'secession' are like those who view the glass as half empty or half full." He also affirmed that "giving the south its fair share is the only guarantee to keep Sudan unified."

The interview with Taha took place in Brussels. He said that his visit to this city and the signing of an agreement with the EU is the starting point for the normalization of relations between Sudan and the EU and the beginning of positive cooperation. He made it clear that the Sudanese Government will not hand over any Sudanese citizen involved in the Darfur massacres. Taha stressed that Sudanese justice is capable of dealing with the culprits, as long as "the crime has taken place in Sudan and against Sudanese citizens."

The Sudanese first vice president told that "Garang's movement may have backed 'Darfur rebels' in the past, but now, this movement has become a political part of the government, although it has yet to become a constitutional part of such a government. Therefore, it is in the interest of this movement to consolidate the foundation of the peace that has been achieved."

The following are the details of this interview:

(Mustafa) There are those who believe that the peace agreement you signed with the SPLA will not last. There are also those who question the criteria used in the distribution of resources and power and who believe that the process will lead to secession.

(Taha) I do not know the justification for such doubt. The peace agreement is clear, and its provisions are unequivocal and convincing. The criteria used in the distribution of resources and power are objective. They were established according to the volume of the contribution made by the south in terms of proceeds obtained from resources, national income, and the demographic dimension of the province. Regarding the talk about secession, that is a different matter. It is like seeing the glass half empty or half full. We believe that giving the south its fair share is the only guarantee to keep Sudan united.

(Mustafa) You mentioned some plans to achieve a global reconciliation in Sudan. What have you achieved in this field?

(Taha) The movement of national reconciliation is steadily progressing. After the signing of the peace agreement, a new dynamism has emerged in the field. This transformation from confrontation to political cooperation between the National Congress and the SPLA will create a new propelling force that could lead to the reassessment and reshaping of all alliances. The first step with regard to this situation is what we see now in terms of negotiations with the National Grouping (the coalition made up of opposition parties). In February, I will be signing an agreement in Cairo with the leaders of this coalition. This agreement will create a new reality, which, we hope, will attract the rest of the political forces.

(Mustafa) Is there any clear strategy for the government in terms of dealing with the Darfur issue?

(Taha) The government has adopted a clear and positive position. It is based on two important facts. The first one is reflected by the existence of issues and problems in Darfur Province. They are recognized by the government, which is trying to solve them in accordance with a vision we set up some time ago. This vision is based on dealing with the social conditions; removing the causes of tribal tension and war; improving the level of services related to water, health, education, and road networks; and setting up development projects. During a UN-sponsored meeting in Nairobi last November, I presented a plan that reflects the government vision for the development of Darfur. On this occasion, we called upon the international community to contribute to this vision and to support those projects, which are worth \$1.2 billion. They could be implemented in a period of three to four years.

The second axis is the fact that the current conflict is a political fight motivated by a political agenda. The situation in the field is used as a pretext to fuel the conflict. The government believes that this conflict is no longer justified, since we have recognized the existence of this problem and have shown we are serious about finding a solution to it. We have even recognized the armed groups and have agreed to negotiate with them. We have also accepted the terms of the cease-fire and the arrangements for humanitarian aid. We renew our call to the armed parties to observe the terms of these two agreements.

(Mustafa) Some reports suggest that the United States will table a resolution that calls for the trial of individuals involved in war crimes that took place in Darfur. What is your comment on that?

(Taha) First, I am not aware of such a draft resolution. However, regarding the situation in the field, the Sudanese Government has carried out its duty in accordance with Sudanese law and the Constitution. The aim was to protect the citizens. The president of the Republic has set up a high-level judicial committee to look into the human rights violations that took place during the fighting in Darfur. The committee submitted its report to the Presidency of the Republic, which issued decrees that set up inquiry and accountability committees to deal with anyone accused of involvement in crimes and human rights violations. Therefore, the government implements the national law with total seriousness and equality for all. The government has no interest in defending anyone convicted of violating the country's laws.

Regarding the US decision to table a draft resolution aimed at imposing international sanctions against Sudan, or any other country, I would like to say that imposing sanctions does not serve world peace, nor does it serve the direct interest for which sanctions are imposed. This is because the policy of imposing sanctions is internationally rejected and inappropriate. The evidence to support such an idea is that when the United States used to follow the path of sanctions against Sudan, the consequence was the prolongation of the war in the south and the occurrence of large-scale human casualties and tragedies. But when the United States abandoned this path and replaced it with the policy of positive dialogue, by concentrating on negotiations and direct contact, the result was reflected by a clear effort in terms of achieving and pushing the peace efforts in the south. We are in favor of the rule of law, but this has to be in accordance with national standards and laws. We are against the policy of imposing sanctions, no matter what the pretexts are.

(Mustafa) You said that any individual involved in crimes would be held accountable in accordance with national standards and laws, how about international standards?

(Taha) It is not a question of national or international standards. National standards follow international ones. Besides, our national laws are based on international

standards. As for the conviction of any individual, it is to be said that the government will not hesitate to establish and implement the law. We believe that the national laws are enough to hold accountable anyone convicted of any crime, as long as such a crime has been committed in Sudan and against a citizen of this country.

(Mustafa) The United Nations will publish a report next month about the allegations of "war crimes" and "ethnic cleansing" in Darfur. What do you expect from this report?

(Taha) I do not want to prejudge the outcome of the report and to comment on it before it is published. This could create an inappropriate atmosphere, for which we do not see any justification.

(Mustafa) Do you have any intention of handing over any Sudanese citizen suspected of war crimes to an international tribunal?

(Taha) We are capable of implementing the law. Besides, the government laws are enough to hold accountable any wrongdoer, as long as the crime has been committed inside Sudan and against Sudanese citizens.

(Mustafa) How do you view the future of relations between Sudan and the United States?

(Taha) There is no doubt that the relations between Sudan and the United States have entered a new phase in recent years, particularly after the signing of the peace agreement with the SPLA. The same can be said about the relations between Sudan and the EU. It is true that the Darfur issue is a source of international concern and interest. We share the same feeling as the international community, and we endeavor to coordinate our national efforts with such concern and interest in order to make positive use of such a combination. The aim is to end the war and not to fuel the problem and increase the fire that could destroy the peace in the south and transform Sudan into a new Somalia.

(Mustafa) Will you allow US companies to invest in Sudan and the return of US oil companies?

(Taha) The door is completely open to US companies and investments to enter Sudan, be it in the field of oil or the infrastructure and industrial sectors, bearing in mind that there are various investment opportunities in Sudan. In fact, US companies have already started to visit Khartoum. They are also holding negotiations and surveys related to investment in Sudan. We do not feel any allergic reaction or embarrassment,

as long as the US investment comes in broad daylight and in accordance with the laws implemented in Sudan.

(Mustafa) In the past, you accused Garang's movement of being involved in events in Darfur. Do you believe that following the peace agreement, the SPLA will put an end to these practices?

(Taha) It is true that before the signing of the peace agreement, the SPLA had links and contacts with the rebels in Darfur. This movement may have even provided help to the rebellion in Darfur. However, since the peace agreement, the SPLA has become a political part of the government, but not yet a constitutional part of such a government. Therefore, it is in our interest to consolidate the foundation of the peace that has been achieved. This peace process is bound to play a new role in terms of putting an end to the war. This is what we are trying to achieve in coordination with the SPLA and all parties related to this issue.

I would like to reiterate that what happened in Darfur was a political pretext put forward by some parties that do not want Sudan to become stable. The government has indeed admitted the injustices committed in Darfur. It also has a clear and defined plan to deal with the problems of the province, whether they are the tribal conflicts, the dispute over water and natural resources, or the province's share in the development and services. This plan, established by the government, existed prior to the explosion of the conflict in Darfur. The question that needs to be asked is: Why did the situation in Darfur explode and the rebellion start at a time when the government established its plan and when the prospect of peace started to appear? The answer is: There is a power struggle in Khartoum between some political forces that do not want to see the current government succeed in achieving peace; nor do they want to see the south enjoying peace under these circumstances. The situation in Darfur has been used as a pretext in this political struggle. However, we are committed to dealing with the situation in Darfur, to implementing justice, and to providing the citizens in this part of Sudan an opportunity with regard to managing their local affairs and participating in the general affairs of Sudan. The government made this point clear through the peace agreement with the SPLA.

(Mustafa) How do you describe Sudan's relations with the EU following your visit to Brussels?

(Taha) The signing of an agreement with the EU is the starting point for the normalization of relations between Sudan and the EU and the beginning of a new phase of positive cooperation with this entity. We are trying to achieve such an objective in conformity with some special and defined plans related to the implementation of the peace agreement between the government and the SPLA. We

believe that the cooperation prospects with the European side are wide, and we are trying to take advantage of this opportunity in order to set up projects and to extend the scope of cooperation, particularly in the field of development, technical cooperation, and all other sectors needed in Sudan, in our effort to reestablish the infrastructure and rebuild what has been destroyed by the war. This is not the case in the south only, but also in other regions. It is true that Darfur events represent a cloud in the relations between Sudan and the EU, but with a continuous dialogue we can define a degree of direct cooperation in order to contain the Darfur crisis in such a way that it does not hamper this new phase of positive cooperation.

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