

The Republic of South Sudan and the Meaning of Independence

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Welcome People of South Sudan to the Comity of Nations

On July 9, 2011, the people of the Republic of South Sudan raised their flag in Juba to symbolize the declaration of political independence. This ascension to independence was one more step in the peace process that is supposed to bring the peoples of the Sudan from war to peace. This peace came after the second civil war. The first civil war, which began a year before the independence of Sudan, lasted from 1955 to 1972. In 2005, the Comprehensive Peace Agreement was signed after 23 years of war (1982-2005). This agreement stipulated that after six years there should be a referendum where the people of South Sudan would

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make a decision whether they would remain part of the Sudan or become an independent state. A referendum was held in January 2011 and South Sudanese voted overwhelmingly for independence. The present political leaders of the SPLM (Sudan People's Liberation Movement) had campaigned for independence as the option. One other option would have been for the leaders in the Sudan to fight for transformation for all people of the Sudan and to become a force to beat back the conservative fundamentalists in the northern part of the Sudan. We respect the choice of the leaders of South Sudan and this new state will be welcomed to be the 54th member of the African Union and the 193rd member of the United Nations. With more than 2.5 million persons perishing in the last war that lasted for 23 years, the people paid a very high price for this independence and serious engagement will be needed by the pan African community along with all progressive persons to ensure that the sacrifices for independence would not be in vain.

Pan Africanists, African Unity and Secession of States

In welcoming the Republic of South Sudan to membership of the African Union, our branch of the pan African movement does not in any way diminish the call for the urgency of the unity of all the peoples of Africa. With each passing day and the crisis of capitalism, rampant militarism and imperialist military interventions, gradual implosion of the dollar, regional trade blocs and challenges of global warming, it is clearer that only a democratic and united people of Africa can negotiate with the

new emerging powers to ensure that Africans can have the space for transformation, peace, and social reconstruction.

Commenting on this question of South Sudan before the referendum,¹ I highlighted our most recent experience in Africa of an emerging state that was carved out of an existing state, the case of Eritrea. Twenty years after independence, the peoples of Eritrea are now fighting against the government that was supposed to be a leading force for liberation. Eritrea and Ethiopia have fought wars senselessly over strips of land, mainly Badme. Both societies have diverted scarce resources to military projects instead of concentrating on the health and wellbeing of the people.

The people of the Republic of South Sudan have captured their independence 50 years after many African countries became independent. We can learn from the positive and negative lessons of these 50 years of African independence. One of the most positive lessons was the solidarity of Africans against apartheid. It was the organized political, economic, military, and diplomatic cohesion in Africa that supported the peoples of Southern Africa to oppose racism and external domination. There are numerous other positive lessons from the independence of Africa, but the negative lessons seek to completely overshadow the positive lessons. One major negative lesson has been how some leaders have exploited the people's political independence, and acted as conveyor belt to drain wealth from Africa. From Nairobi to Abidjan and from Harare to Tunis, we have examples of leaders with billions of dollars outside of Africa while the people who fought for independence do not have the basic amenities of food, clean water, clothing, health, housing, decent education, and a peaceful environment.

¹ Horace Campbell, "Which Way Sudan? : A Pan-African Reflection", *Pambazuka News*, 507, 25 November 2010, online at <http://pambazuka.org/en/category/features/69065> (accessed 25 October 2011).

Already, even before the independence flag was hoisted in South Sudan, one met children of the new rulers of this nascent nation in Nairobi where these leaders have formed alliances with the most notorious exploiters in Kenya and East Africa. Transforming the education and health services in the Sudan will require that these very same leaders build institutions and develop infrastructure along with social services for the people.

The Republic of South Sudan has joined the international community with some of the lowest development indices in the world. In a new country where there are virtually no roads, no organized system of delivering public electricity and sanitation, in fact, the South Sudan has a real opportunity to pursue a project of reconstruction that starts with the prioritization of the wellbeing of the people. Such a project will require that the peoples of the South Sudan learn the positive lessons in all other parts of Africa where the peoples have rejected neo-liberalism and the wholesale give away of natural resources.

Currently, in all parts of Africa, even in Nairobi where the children of the leaders of South Sudan are going to school, the people are demonstrating against high food prices, genetically modified food, and the exploitation of the working poor. In Tunisia and Egypt, young people, workers, women, farmers are still involved in a revolution to oppose neoliberal capitalism. Many Western capitalists converged on Juba for the independence celebration. But the reconstruction of an independent Republic of South Sudan cannot be left to the whims of neo-liberal investors.

The memories of slavery were very much on the minds of the peoples who celebrated independence. Under the new constitution of the Sudan, there are explicit statements on "Freedom from Slavery, Servitude and Forced Labour." Article 13 of the constitution states as follows: "Slavery and slave trade in all form are prohibited. No person shall be held in slavery or servitude." "No person shall be required to perform forced or compulsory labour

except as a penalty upon conviction by a competent court of law”.² These clauses must be supported with vigorous support for trade unions so that old forms of enslavement are not replaced by wage slavery and other forms of bondage and peonage.

The reconstruction of the South Sudan requires massive injection of funds to build schools, roads, dams, hospitals and clinics, houses, and parks. Leaving such a project in the hands of foreign private capital will serve to exacerbate growing inequalities. The new tasks of building a society to meet the needs of the people in the South Sudan must be conducted in a manner that puts the interests and wellbeing of the ordinary people above everything else. This reconstruction must be oriented away from the moribund World Bank models that have marred the self-determination projects of many African states.

Paradoxically, the leadership of South Sudan and progressive pan Africanists working for the reconstruction of the South Sudan now have an opportunity to invoke the Nkrumaist sense of integrated and regional reconstruction which fosters African unity, freedom, peace and prosperity for African people. As a landlocked country bordered by Ethiopia to the east; Kenya to the southeast; Uganda to the south; the Democratic Republic of the Congo to the southwest; the Central African Republic to the west; and the Sudan to the north, the management of peaceful relations will necessitate the kind of deft support that has been given by the African Union, with the hard work of the mediator, Thabo Mbeki.

The Wealth of the Republic of South Sudan

The Republic of South Sudan is entering independence as one of the richest and most resource-endowed countries in Africa. There are

² The Transitional Constitution of the Republic of South Sudan, 2011, in Sudan Tribune, online at http://www.sudantribune.com/IMG/pdf/The_Draft_Transitional_Constitution_of_the_ROSS2-2.pdf (accessed 25 October 2011).

many areas of wealth that are already outstanding among the vast wealth of this new member of the international community. I will highlight five. The first is the wealth in the more than eight million people of the country. Some of the major nationalities in the South Sudan – including Dinka, Shilluk, Nuer, Acholi, Lotuku, Bari, Otuho, Zande, and Ubangia – are among the original peoples of Africa who resisted many forms of domination and efforts to integrate the South Sudan into the world capitalist system. These people resisted Arabization, Christianization, and Islamization. Today we know that bio-prospectors are studying these people to try to understand their bloodlines and their genetic makeup for huge profits for the Western pharmaceutical industry. Southern Sudanese were among 43 different African communities whose genes were studied and patented by American academics Sarah A. Tishkoff and Floyd Allan Reed. These people’s genes were discovered to contain what is called the single nucleotide polymorphisms or SNPs, materials associated with the ability to digest milk products (lactose tolerance) in adult African populations.³

The second source of wealth is the water resources of this new nation. South Sudan is one of the states that share the Nile and the wetlands system that includes the vast swamp region of the Sudd formed by the White Nile (locally called the Bahr al Jabal). Wetlands generally include swamps, marshes, bogs and similar areas. The wetlands of the Sudd cover an area half the size of France and this is one of the most ecologically diverse spaces on earth. The management of this resource can be a foundation for cooperation or conflict with their neighbors to the north, both the Sudan and Egypt. Though many people focus on oil resources, water resources have to be managed in a way that generates peaceful relations.

³ Edward Hammond and Mariam Mayet, *Genes from Africa: the Colonisation of Human DNA* (Melville, South Africa: African Centre for Biosafety, 2009; ACB Briefing Paper; no. 5 2009), online at http://www.biosafetyafrica.org.za/images/stories/dmdocument/s/genes_from_africa.pdf (accessed 25 October 2011).

The third resource is the rich agricultural land and genetic resources. Here is a country of 619,745 sq km (239,285 sq miles), larger than Portugal and Spain combined; and with a population of eight million persons with vast tropical forests, swamps, and grassland. The leadership of South Sudan should look beyond the neo-liberal foreign agro-corporations and land grabbers who masquerade as job creators and food security guarantors. So far, these foreign interests have grabbed millions of hectares of South Sudanese land. According to one report,

“In just four years, between the start of 2007 and the end of 2010, foreign interests sought or acquired a total of 2.64 million hectares of land in the agriculture, forestry and biofuel sectors alone (in South Sudan). That is a larger land area than the entire country of Rwanda. If one adds domestic investments, some of which date back to the pre-war period, and investments in tourism and conservation, the figure rises to 5.74 million hectares, or nine percent of Southern Sudan’s total land area”.⁴

The fourth resource is oil. This country is endowed with over three trillion cubic feet of natural gas reserve and more than five billion barrels of oil reserves. Presently, more than 90 per cent of the budget of the South Sudan comes from oil production. This production is dominated by oil companies from China, Malaysia and India, while Western oil companies are lobbying hard to break this investment hold of the Third World countries.

In addition to its petroleum, South Sudan is rich in minerals such as iron ore, copper, chromium, tungsten, silver and gold. With this vast wealth, the leaders have a choice of taking the country down the road of a Nigeria or DRC, or the road of

countries such as Malaysia, Norway and Vietnam. In the later three countries, the political leaders made a choice to use the wealth and resources of the country for the people and judiciously entered into foreign relations that strengthen processes of transformation.

The fifth major resource that is linked to the first resource is the linguistic diversity of this new multi-ethnic nation. South Sudan is composed of more than 200 ethnic groups and is, along with the adjacent Nuba Hills, one of the most linguistically diverse regions of Africa. The United Nations recognize that there is a fundamental linkage between language and traditional knowledge (TK) in relation to biodiversity. The Interim Constitution of the South Sudan (as noted above) states that “All indigenous languages of South Sudan are national languages and shall be respected, developed and promoted.” It will require concerted efforts to transcend regional chauvinistic drives among some sections of this new state to ensure that all languages are respected.

South Sudan and Her Neighbors

The Republic of South Sudan and its sister nation of the Sudan need each other, and it will be in the interest of all of their people to work for peaceful coexistence and to strengthen relations based on mutual respect. This will be one of the toughest challenges because outstanding issues of militarism, plunder, arrogance, exploitation, and racism will predispose some sections of the northern political leadership towards military engagement with the Republic of South Sudan. In the immediate future, negotiations over the autonomy of Abyei and the questions of South Kordofan and the Blue Nile State will prove to be challenging. It is here where the Republic of South Sudan will have to work closely with the neighbors in East Africa and the African Union so that there is an energetic international presence to prevent an outbreak of war.

⁴ David K. Deng, *The New Frontier: A Baseline Survey of Large-Scale Land-Based Investment in Southern Sudan* (Norwegian People’s Aid, 2011), online at http://www.npaid.org/filestore/NPA_New_Frontier.pdf (accessed 25 October 2011).

Ultimately, there will be need for intensified political work among the people of the north who want peace to remove the cliques around Bashir who use Islamism and militarism to maintain themselves in power. The oil from the South goes through to the north to be refined, and it will be correct for the people of the independent South Sudan to renegotiate the terms of the relations with the north over oil. Plans for the building of a 200 kilometer-long link to the existing South-Eldoret-Mombasa pipeline in Kenya will create tensions with Khartoum and the leaders of the Republic of South Sudan will have to draw on their experiences in negotiations to ensure that Africa is not dragged into another war over oil. With the information on the development of oil and gas resources in Tanzania and Uganda, the leaders of the South will need a comprehensive vision that would link such resources into a grid to serve the needs of Africans first.

Relations with East Africa will be very important to assist the reconstruction project. Leaders such as Yoweri Museveni and Mwai Kibaki do not provide good examples for future forms of governance in the Republic of South Sudan. Moreover, the militaristic traditions that inspire disaffected leaders of the SPLM to create militias to launch attacks on communities provide a lethal cocktail when the forces of the Lords Resistance Army (LRA) are already using this region as its base for destruction.

Many South Sudanese have lived in Uganda, Kenya, Egypt, Tanzania, Ethiopia, and north Sudan. They have relations with trade unionists, cooperatives, schools, churches, mosques, nongovernmental organizations and other sections of what is called civil society. In South Africa, trade union centers such as COSATU can assist and the people of South Sudan should be aware that it is not only the BEE (Black Economic Empowerment program) forces from South Africa who have an interest in the Sudan. Programs such as the training initiatives that have been undertaken with the University of South Africa (UNISA) can be expanded to include other universities and tertiary

institutions of learning in South Africa and other African states. The health and wellbeing and education of the people of Republic of South Sudan are a pan African issue.

International Relations beyond the “Lost Boys” Syndrome

During the time of the struggles against militarism in the north there were over four million Sudanese who were displaced by war and destruction. In the midst of this war, sections of the conservative right in America, especially the most racist and fundamentalist Christians, projected themselves as saviors of the peoples of Southern Sudan. This mentality of saving Africans infected one group of young people from South Sudan who were dubbed, “The Lost Boys of Sudan.” While we empathize with the toll of the war on these young men, we wonder where they were lost from or whether the women and the young girls who were also displaced by the war were irrelevant.

The new nation must pursue reconstruction and rehabilitation beyond the limitations of the “lost boys” syndrome. The new constitution of the South Sudan already signals that gender equality is a priority. It provides “for equal pay, benefits such as maternity leave, equal participation in public life, equal property and inheritance rights and the development of laws to combat traditional practices that are harmful to women.” The Constitution further states explicitly that all levels of government shall:

- “ (a) promote women participation in public life and their representation in the legislative and executive organs by at least twenty-five per cent as an affirmative action to redress imbalances created by history, customs, and traditions;
- (b) enact laws to combat harmful customs and traditions which undermine the dignity and status of women; and
- (c) provide maternity and child care and medical care for pregnant and lactating women. Women shall have the right to own

property and share in the estates of their deceased husbands together with any surviving legal heir of the deceased.”

The translation of these principles into substantive reality will be important in supporting the wider struggles for the emancipation of women in all parts of North and South Sudan. This is even more so in the context of reports coming out of the country. As stated in one report, “violence against women and girls is pervasive, devastating, and a tolerated problem in Sudan, a legacy of Sudan's brutal civil war, during which it was commonplace” (<http://www.ipsnews.net/news.asp?idnews=56457>)⁵ At the time of the struggles for independence in Angola and Mozambique, leaders of the liberation movements maintained that, “the liberation of women is a fundamental necessity for the revolution, the guarantee of its continuity and the precondition of for its victory.” But today, one can see in Angola and all over Africa that the women are still fighting so that African independence recognizes the centrality of the contribution of women.

The so-called lost boys mentality in Sudan has induced concepts of charity and dependence so that even in some of the most racist communities in the United States, the same racists who see Africans as inferior people sought self gratification by presenting themselves as sponsors of projects of the Lost Boys. This Lost Boys syndrome is one of the most overt symptoms of the scavenging humanitarianism that seeks to take away self respect and dignity from Africans. The Republic of South Sudan has enough resources to mount a credible reconstruction programs that brings together credible international players from every corner of the world – East, West, North, and South – so that the reconstruction program is not based on going around the world with a begging bowl. Indeed, the reconstruction of the Republic of South Sudan must be done with dignity.

⁵ Protus Onyango, “Born into Crisis – Violence Against Women Continues”, IPS 13 July 2011, online at <http://www.ipsnews.net/news.asp?idnews=56457> (accessed 25 October 2011).

Completing the Tasks of Liberation

South Sudan is also launching a new currency. This currency bears the image of John Garang. However, we would like the people of the South to honor the memory of Garang substantively and not devalue him and the principles he stood for by simply putting his face on the currency. John Garang was a member of the Dar es Salam school of liberation, an associate of Walter Rodney and freedom fighters from all parts of Africa. John Garang fought for peace, unity, and the upliftment of all of the people of Sudan. As the leader of the SPLM, his vision of the independence, freedom, and unity of all Africans was something for which he fought. Teaching about Garang (including his strengths and weaknesses) and about the struggle of South Sudan will give the people the pride that is needed. In Jamaica, the Jamaican government placed the image of Marcus Garvey on the currency, but seventy years after the passing of Marcus Garvey, there is still no systematic teaching of his philosophies and opinions. The people of South Sudan cannot afford for the memory and teachings of John Garang to be taken away from them and be used to legitimize a new class of exploiters.

Those who conspired to kill John Garang are real criminals who thought they could kill his dream. The same International Criminal Court that has gone after Bashir has not gone after the other killers and the economic crimes committed against the people of the South. One of the major crimes of Bashir was to perpetuate war to reinforce the historic plunder and exploitation of the people of the South.

However, the people of the South cannot fight to remove the northern exploiters only to pave the way for southern exploiters. It is here where we call on the organized sections of the people to organize against the Africanization of exploitation and oppression. As Frantz Fanon said, “exploitation can wear a black face as well as a white one.” The complete liberation of the people of South Sudan, like that of other Africans, would be accomplished

when the leaders put the dignity, wellbeing, and peaceful coexistence of the people above and beyond everything else.

We welcome the independence of South Sudan and this independence will alert us to work even harder for the full unity of Africa because we know that the independence of South Sudan will be meaningless outside of the consolidation of full unity, dignity, and respect for all African peoples.