

III. LOOKING INTO THE FUTURE: PRESERVING UNITY AND DIVERSITY

Even though the history of the South Sudan appears like an uninterrupted sequence of man-made disasters in which an accountable number of innocent people have been abducted as slaves, were starved to death, got killed by diseases or were strangled by the military movements, no living people should ever believe that there is no hope for an end of their suffering. The present liberation-movement was meant to be a struggle for human dignity, for freedom, development and respect for each other, and as this struggle is not over yet, there is no reason on the part of the South Sudanese to despair or to give up. Even though there are at present only a few signs of rationality, such signs, such movements for reconciliation and peace do exist at the grassroots-level of society; if only they could be permitted to spread and to grow, they could bring peace to the South Sudan, first of all a peace within itself and eventually a peace with its neighbours.

The following project to create a House of Nationalities in which there would be space for everybody and where people would meet each other with respect and dignity will be one decisive step towards the so much needed peace and unity.

The Aberdare-Seminar

In November 2000 a group of South Sudanese hailing from different ethnic groups, members of the civil society and political movements, political activists, representatives of women and youth organisations, church and religious organisations, each in their individual capacities, gathered to attend a *three-day seminar in Aberdare* Country Club in Nyeri, Central Province, Kenya. The seminar - sponsored by four Sudanese civil-society organisations, namely the Horn of Africa Centre for Democracy and Development (HACDAD), the New Sudan Council of Churches (NSCC), the South Sudan Law Society (SSLS) and the Centre for Documentation and Advocacy (CDA) - discussed *inter alia* the issue of governance in a future South Sudan state.

It was agreed that the present, unprecedented ethnic conflicts which tend to mirror the divisions that had rocked the South Sudan in the terminal years of the Southern Region¹ and the apparent political disunity in the national liberation movement which had been occasioned by the split within the ranks and files of the SPLM/A² render *the issue of governance in the South Sudan* and *the building of a South Sudanese vision on the appropriate governance modalities* imperative.

On the path to the South Sudan's self-government and statehood, the question of governance is of a crucial importance. In Aberdare, the participants in the seminar discussed in retrospect the experience of postcolonial State-formation in sub-Saharan Africa. It was highlighted that nearly all post-colonial states adopted the European model of state-formation, embarking on building nation-states characterised by dominance and hegemony of one, usually the largest single ethnic group [Nigeria, Kenya, Uganda, etc.] or of a politically, economically and culturally dominant minority [Sudan, Rhodesia, Burundi, etc.]. A consensus evolved amongst the participants that the ubiquitous ethnic conflicts and rivalries that rock most African states today are directly linked to the failure of these models of state to carry the cultural and linguistic aspirations of the constituent ethnicities.

¹ Following his abrogation of the Addis Ababa Agreement in June 1983, President Nimeiri by a stroke of the pen dismantled the Southern Region. This came against a background of strong movement for 'kokora' or re-division in Equatoria and ethnic conflicts over borders triggered by the regime.

² This in the wake of the failed "Nasir-coup" which failed to oust Dr. John Garang de Mabior from the leadership of the SPLM/A in 1991

The hegemony of one ethnic group, whether large or small, can only be maintained in the context of a one-party state, through state-violence and by brute force. But in the context of the present world order whereby the state must be seen to promote political pluralism and equity in the distribution of opportunities and resources, social justice, rule of law, peace and stability, this has become untenable. The state in the South Sudan must therefore be conceived not in the context of a nation-state in which the hegemony of the largest single national group could be a serious impediment to its stability and harmony among its people, but in the framework of *a multi-national state that will accommodate all the ethnic groups on the basis of sovereignty and independent linguistic and cultural identity irrespective of their numerical strength.*

A multi-national state thus must ascribe to the principles of

Equality: There must be mutual recognition of all the ethnic groups in the South Sudan on the basis of equality, freedom and justice for all;

Acceptance: The ethnic entities must mutually accept each other and live together in peace and harmony on the basis of equal citizenship;

Respect: Equality and acceptance must be reflected in the respect for the social and cultural values and the human and political rights of other ethnic groups;

Freedom: All ethnic groups must enjoy freedom of association, movement, faith, expression, etc.

A multi-national state that recognises ethnic, political and cultural diversity gives voice and visibility to all nationalities, including the smallest and most marginalised ones, and promotes their respective identities. *The recognition of each and every nationality does not represent a reversion to tribalism,* well on the contrary, it must be considered as a paradigm of nation-building that is deeply rooted in the realities of the South Sudan.

Thus, to most of the participants in the Aberdare seminar, the issue of governance takes a central stage also in the context of building peace and of resolving the inter- and intra-community conflicts that sprouted from the political and military developments within the SPLM/A. Unfortunately, combatants of the SPLA hailing from different nationalities and ethnic groups found in the South Sudan interacted with each other in the context of the war of liberation, and this sometimes in complete ignorance of each other's values and traditions. They moved among people they never had access to earlier in their lives. And because they were not imbued with political education and an understanding of the nature and laws of the people's war of national liberation, they precipitated conflicts not only with the civil population of other nationalities but also even with their own people.

Peace and reconciliation initiatives

It was in the context of resolving these conflicts and of bringing about reconciliation and unity that different peace- and reconciliation-initiatives were launched since 1991/1992. Among them, the *People-to-People-Peace-Process*, initiated by the New Sudan Council of Churches, had a particular impact. The significance of the naming lies in the fact that, if left alone, people dialogue quite easily and often can quickly agree with one another.

The resolution of the micro-level South-South conflicts definitely impacts and has a strong bearing on the search for a negotiated peaceful resolution of the macro-level North-South conflict, to which a just and sustainable resolution cannot be found without peace and unity among the South Sudanese people. Therefore, the People-to-people-peace-process as the only feasible agent available at present to bring unity and reconciliation between South Sudan nationalities must be supported and enabled to achieve its objectives, whether the South would seek a negotiated peaceful settlement or a military solution to the conflict with the North.

Notwithstanding its ultimate significance, *the people-to-people-peace process as a vehicle for reconciliation and unity among the different nationalities in the South Sudan shouldn't be considered as an end in itself*, believing that it would have achieved its objective once reconciliation and peace are restored. This is because the current conflicts at the different levels in the South Sudan, whether at the North-South level, at an ethnic level or at the political level in the liberation movement, all hinge on lack of strong institutions of governance, – and *good* governance for that matter. Secondly, the process suffers from a structural weakness that inhibits addressing the fundamental issues of governance in the South Sudan.

Table 2: *List of Nationalities and Sub-nationalities according to their geographical location*

	District	Nationality	Section / Sub-section
01	Aweil	Dinka (<i>Jieng</i>) Jurchol (<i>Luo</i>)	Rek
02	Gogrial	Dinka (<i>Jieng</i>) Jur-Mananger	Rek - Awan Riau - Marial - Wuny - Amoic - Twic Thon - Apuk - Nyang - Awan Pajok - Adhiang
03	Western Bahr-el- Ghazal	Sere Ndogo Zande Gollo Bai Balanda-Bor Balanda-Bviri Bongo Jurchol (<i>Luo</i>) Banda Feroghe Binga Yulu Aja Shatt Kreish	Ndogo Hufra Naka
04	Tonj	Dinka (<i>Jieng</i>) Bongo	Rek -Akok -Kwac Thii -Jowier Luac
05	Rumbek	Dinka (<i>Jieng</i>) 'Beli (<i>Jurbel</i>)	Agar Gok -Pakam

	District	Nationality	Section / Sub-section
06	Yirol	Dinka (<i>Jieng</i>) Atuot (<i>Reel</i>)	Ciec -Adior -Gok -Koc-lou Aliab -Apak -Luac -Kuac -Akot
07	Tambura	Zande Balanda-Bviri	
08	Yambio	Zande Mundu	
09	Maridi	Baka Mundu Avukaya Morokodo Zande	
10	Mundri	Moro 'Beli (<i>Jurbel</i>)	
11	Yei River-District	Makaraka Pöjulu Kakwa Keliku Kuku Lugbwara	
12	Juba	Bari Mundari Nyangwara Lolubo Pöjulu	
13	Torit	Otuho Horiok Lopit Lango Logir Imatong Lokoya Päri Madi Acholi Dongatona Tenet	

	District	Nationality	Section / Sub-section
14	Kapoeta	Toposa Tid Nyangatom Jiye Didinga Larim (<i>Boya</i>)	
15	Bor	Dinka (<i>Jieng</i>)	Nyarweng Hol Twic Bor -Agok -Athoi
16	Akobo	Nuer (<i>Nädh</i>) Anyuak	Lou -Gon -Mor
17	Fangak	Nuer (<i>Nädh</i>) Dinka (<i>Jieng</i>)	Laak Gawaar Luac Thoi
18	Kodok	Shilluk (<i>Collo</i>)	
19	Bailiet	Dinka (<i>Jieng</i>)	
20	Nasir	Nuer (<i>Nädh</i>)	Jikany Gajaak Gagwang Gajok
21	Renk	Dinka (<i>Jieng</i>) Maban Uduk	Abialang Nyiell Dongjol
22	Malakal	Shilluk (<i>Collo</i>)	
23	Bentiu	Nuer (<i>Nädh</i>) Dinka (<i>Jieng</i>)	Bul Lek Jikany Jagei Dok Nyuong Panaru Alor
24	Pibor	Murle Anyuak Suri	

The importance of future governance

The future governance is central to the Southern agenda to build the nation on the reality of diversity, respect for human rights, rule of law and justice for all. The agenda must be to forge a national consciousness in the South Sudan in which each individual is to enjoy a dual identity:

- a) a *nationality-identity* (such as being Dinka, Zande, Nuer, Shilluk, Bari, Jiye etc.) defined by ethnic consciousness and adherence to shared values, and
- b) a *citizenship-identity* (to be a South Sudanese) defined by consciousness and membership of a region – the South Sudan.

What this really means is that one can be a South Sudanese [when in contact with people from other countries including the North Sudan] without losing one's ethnicity or ethnic identity [of being, for example, a Dinka, a Nuer, a Suri, a Zande etc.] and vice versa. This duality may be possible even within one same ethnic group. For instance, among the Dinka [Agar, Twic, Rek, Ngok, etc.] or the Nuer [Lou, Gajaak, Gajok, Jikany, Bul, Lek, Dok, etc.], sub-sections exist without their members losing the sense of being a Mony-jang or a Gat-Nuer. Similarly, among the Shilluk [Kwarath, Kwajulo, Kwajwok, Kwajango, Kwamwoi, etc.], clans proudly announce their respective identities when in Pachodo as part of the Shilluk nation. We see no serious contradiction coming from this self-consciousness in the course of nation-building in the South Sudan. *The contradiction will sprout only as a result of neglecting or marginalizing others.* In this vein it will be necessary that we think of building in our psyche a double self-consciousness which will consist out of *an identity based on own individual culture* (which we currently call tribes, nationalities or ethnic groups) and *an identity based on the national cultural space* (the South Sudan).

These entire issues are contingent on governance and must be addressed in a comprehensive manner – whether the South Sudan shall remain part of the Sudan or will achieve independent statehood.

The struggle for liberation and freedom from foreign domination must be linked to constitution-building that has to mirror the identities, the political and social aspirations and the goals of the many nationalities in the South Sudan: it must affirm that *the unity being sought shall be built on our diversities*, whether ethnic, linguistic, religious, etc.

To separate the struggle for liberation and freedom from constitution-building in the South Sudan endangers the liberation-struggle itself because the oppressor can in fact be anybody and of any colour, including black. The liberation-struggle, therefore, does not necessarily mean only chasing the Arab army from the South in order to replace it with another oppressive system. *Liberation means defining our identity and spelling out clearly our political direction, objectives and the strategies for achieving these objectives.* What the South Sudanese therefore need at the moment is not to covert themselves and their friends to the liberation but to elaborately come up with a programme of political, economic and social action for building appropriate institutions in the South Sudan. *We must now define in clear and unequivocal terms the South Sudan we want and the governance system which we find appropriate and suitable for its diversities.*

This will be the only way to consolidate peace and unity amongst our diverse peoples and the mechanism by which the on-going “people-to-people-peace and reconciliation process” can be dovetailed to the constitution-making and the fundamental issues of good governance. This needs to be cultivated now rather than later.

Therefore, *in what concerns the constitution and the institutions built upon it, the South Sudan must - in order to avoid repeating the mistakes - take serious cognisance of past experiences in the former Southern Region.* The former People's Regional Assembly and

the National Liberation Council of the SPLM, for instance, held vigorous political debates and demonstrated tendencies to liberal democratic principles, which indeed constitute healthy political legacies of the South. The former People's Regional Assembly in particular functioned impressively in terms of supervision and holding the former Regional Government accountable. *The major weakness of both institutions lies only in their lack of determination and effectiveness in building a consensus among the people*, what explains the present disunity and the conflicts we are grappling with.

In Aberdare, *the issue of a bi-cameral house of parliament for the South Sudan* made up of upper and lower chambers was floated. Nevertheless, a consensus seemed to have been built among the participants that the lower chamber (House of Representatives) representing the geographic and social diversities would be constituted on the basis of demographic considerations, while the upper chamber (House of Nationalities) should mirror the national, ethnic, linguistic and cultural diversities found in the South Sudan and would be constituted on the basis of national and ethnic identities. These were constructive, positive ideas which could point a way forward towards governance in a self-administering South Sudan.

A need for the creation of a national consciousness and of an awareness of common values

A South Sudanese national consciousness is yet to evolve, and this despite a history of common struggle, dating back hundreds of years, whether against enslavement, Anglo-Egyptian colonisation or the domination and oppression by the North after independence.

A national consciousness gets forged in the course of facing a common enemy or of building a common enterprise (European experience in 16th and 17th centuries). In the South Sudan, the existence of slavers and oppressors in the form of the Turks, Egyptians, Jalieen, Shaigia and British did not constitute a sufficient basis for the evolution of a South Sudanese national consciousness upon which could have been built a South Sudanese national political ideology for liberation.

The colonial policy of '*divide and rule*' - later implemented by the Arabs to achieve the same results - that had emphasised separate identity was an important factor in preventing the evolution and cultivation of a national consciousness without which the struggle for liberation and statehood becomes very fragile indeed. It is true that self-identity in the South Sudan is powerful to the extent that some of the ethnic conflicts mentioned above may be attributed to this strong sense of self and collective worth and dignity (tribe/ethnicity/nationality). But it could also play an essentially positive role by providing the basis which could be relied upon when evolving and enriching collective national (South Sudanese) consciousness and identity.

It has been stressed earlier that most South Sudanese, particularly those who have not had the opportunity to leave their home-areas, lack knowledge about other ethnic communities and more specifically about those cultures which are not easily accessible. Such ignorance has generated suspicions and provoked animosities. Some of the conflicts mentioned before (and indeed the resulting lack of unity) could be partly blamed on ignorance and lack of contact. Instead of merely using negative arguments by endlessly referring to past and present foreign oppression and domination, the peoples of the South Sudan need to know themselves in order to be able to define *in positive terms* their struggle for statehood.

Knowledge about minor ethnic communities is still scarce, even amongst intellectuals and military leaders; asked about their own cultural identity, most people in the South Sudan would answer in purely negative terms and say that they are “not Arabs”, adding possibly that they are proud to be a member of this or that particular ethnic group. Essentially, this piece of paper calls for the recognition of the political and cultural importance of each of the many ethnic communities found in the Sudan and explains why unity will not be possible without peace and understanding between the groups. However, if cultural diversity is indeed the richness, the fascinating beauty and the spiritual force of the South Sudan, there is obviously also a need of defining *common* values. Because emphasis is always laid on differences rather than on similarities, *the awareness of common cultural values needs to be raised urgently*, – not only amongst the ethnic groups but more particularly amongst all those intellectuals who claim to represent “their” people.

The House of Nationalities should thus become a place where people could not only discuss their existing differences but where people would become conscious of commonly shared cultural and spiritual values. The creation of a self-consciousness of having the common identity of being a South Sudanese will be one fundamental function of a future House of Nationalities. Paradoxically, *the public political and cultural recognition of the importance of ethnic identity does open up the minds of the people*: free to express their differences and proud of the own identity, people will lose fear of the other and move closer together. Diversity will produce unity, knowledge will generate intimacy, tolerance, and eventually feelings of sympathy and possibly friendship.

A sense of responsibility for the country’s other cultures, in particular for the preservation of languages

The Arab disregard for the value of Black African cultures has fuelled the present conflict in the Sudan. On the background of conflicts based on cultural ignorance and the resulting racism, it would be preposterous for people who are struggling for freedom and justice to be insensitive to other cultures. There are about sixty nationalities and national groups in South Sudan, all speaking different languages and having evolved a variety of own cultural values. *No culture is better or superior to the other*. Each culture exists by its own right; it can’t be allowed to exist by or because of any other culture(s).

Knowledge of the country, its different peoples, languages, beliefs and habits must be cultivated and inculcated by campaigns of awareness-raising through formal, informal or non-formal [civic education] methods, through development of a school system and a curriculum that engenders interest in indigenous technology and other branches of knowledge.

Therefore, in the course of the struggle for political institutions in the South Sudan and in order to build confidence and to create harmony, there is an urgent need to act responsibly and with intimate sensitivity towards the cultures of other people, no matter how simple and less developed they may appear to be. The basic rule is that respect of other cultures also translates into respect for one’s own cultural values.

Language is the most precious treasury inherited by the people. It is the vehicle for the transmission of their thoughts, ideas and knowledge, the carrier of their collective wisdom and indeed their personal identity. Nearly all the nationalities in South Sudan have hitherto retained their respective language. Even though some have adopted other languages (as for instance Dinka or Arabic) to communicate with other nationalities, this happened without any visible danger of losing the own language. There can’t be any ulterior motive for not allowing others to use their own language than one of oppression and domination, as this had happened when the Arabs tried to suppress African languages by imposing their own idiom.

The struggle by the people of the South Sudan for liberation and separate identity is also a struggle for the preservation of their languages and for the right to develop them. Thanks to the translation of the Bible into indigenous languages, most if not all languages and dialects spoken in the South Sudan have been alphabetised, and this is what allows to preserve and to teach them.

A need to create organs for a peaceful resolution of conflicts

The fact that the South Sudan is composed out of a multiplicity of ethnicities, languages and cultures explains why there is a high potential for conflicts and why many conflicts follow ethnic lines. Experience has shown that the South Sudanese resent oppression and domination from whatever quarter (external or internal) and quickly take up arms to resist. The splits in the liberation movement, the proliferation of factions and militia groups (some of them going to the extreme of allying with the common enemy) are a living testimony to this fact. We have also witnessed how the Nuer became fragmented into feuding sections and clans. The Shilluk-based SPLM/A-United likewise split and fought fierce battles against each other along the lines of Gar (Northern Shilluk) and Lwak (Southern Shilluk). It was only the intervention of King Kwongo which healed that split.

It was easy to bring under control the conflict between the feuding Shilluk warlords because they all subscribed to the traditional institutions of the Shilluk Kingdom. The Nuer, the Mony-jang and indeed all the other nationalities have equally traditional mechanism for conflict resolution; these were put to test in Wunlit in 1999 and were found to be very useful. It is worth mentioning that the *Wunlit Nuer-Dinka Peace-Covenant* is still holding despite the violations and provocations caused by the military factions.

There is therefore urgent need to create, or rather to recognise, organise, support and consolidate the already existing traditional institutions for a *peaceful resolution of conflicts*. This must get propped up with measures for *conflict-prevention*. The easy availability of the firearms has been the main-cause to the escalation of conflicts and the increasing number of war-victims, particularly among the civil population. Firearms have also allowed small local conflicts to degenerate into real wars, causing terrible bloodshed and leading to unprecedented, traditionally unknown brutalities. Atrocities and the great number of innocent victims have moreover rendered the traditional peaceful resolution of conflicts between different ethnic groups more complicated and sometimes seemingly impossible. *The institutions of conflict-prevention and conflict-resolution must therefore be empowered to control the proliferation of firearms and of small weapons in the communities.*

The organs for peaceful resolution of conflicts in and between communities, large or small, which would require a priori empowerment and consolidation are:

- a) The *traditional leadership*, such as *Kings* (Shilluk, Anyuak), *Chiefs*, *Rainmakers* (Bari, Otuho and the ethnic groups living on the east bank in Equatoria), *Spearmen* (Nuer and Dinka), *Oracle men/women* (Azande), *Elders* (in some communities including women!) and *Monyomiji* (warriors, nyakarchwanya, etc., among the pastoral communities living on the east bank in Equatoria).
- b) The *law-enforcement agencies*: the *Judiciary*, the *courts*, the *police*, the *prisons* and others. The eighteen years of war have completely eroded the rule of law in the South Sudan. This needs to be refurbished to ensure security of people and their property. Establishment of the rule of law through strengthening of these agencies is imperative.

The above-mentioned organs and institutions of course do already operate effectively at the local community-, the district/county-, or the nationality-level and may be used to peacefully resolve conflicts on a local level as well as conflicts between nationalities and national groups.

However, statehood- and nation-building in the South Sudan will involve more than the resolving of conflicts between nationalities or communities. To enhance peace and stability in the whole country, there will be need to create organs of power at the regional level [Bahr-el-Ghazal, Equatoria and Upper Nile] and at the level of the South Sudan for mediating social, economic and political relations between the different nationalities.

