

# The role of the international community

by Gunnar M Sørbø

*The Comprehensive Peace Agreement represents a major opportunity for positive change and sustainable peace in Sudan. History shows, however, that the potential for peace breaking down is great. Continued engagement of the international community could prove crucial.*

Outbreaks of war and violence have followed the failure of peace agreements in several African countries, leading to high death tolls, enormous human suffering and great destruction. The lack of sustained and coordinated international engagement has been a significant contributory factor in these cases. The importance of the international community's role must not be ignored in Sudan's transition to peace.

## Steps towards peace

Firstly, donors must honour the pledges made to support the Sudan peace process. The Oslo donor

conference in April 2005 generated substantial commitments of \$4.5bn but such gatherings have a track record of disbursing smaller sums than promised over a far longer time period than initially expected. Donors have made clear their discomfort at releasing funds while violence persists in Darfur and already there have been problems in securing funds for humanitarian needs in southern Sudan. The rudimentary capabilities of the government in the South will also make it difficult to meet donor requirements for transparency and efficiency in use of funds. This seems likely to lead to a slow take-off for the new post-war era - a dangerous situation given the

far-reaching political challenges to be faced and the high expectations that the government and the SPLM have built up since the CPA was signed.

Secondly, international assistance must be sufficiently coordinated. Coordination is often complicated, however, by the fact that several large agencies tend to be involved in various aspects as well as by the presence of different actors in the UN system and numerous NGOs financed bilaterally through donors. In Afghanistan, donors and aid agencies acknowledged the importance of having a distinct coordination structure that initially was located in the office of the deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG). Without budgetary and staffing power over the agencies, however, the SRSG had little capacity to facilitate coordination - and the international financial institutions were furthermore outside his formal



Jan Pronk,  
UN Secretary-  
General's Special  
representative  
for Sudan, with  
African Union  
troops in Nyala,  
Darfur.

authority. As a result, coordination followed the usual voluntary format. In an innovative move, the formal responsibility for coordination was subsequently taken over by the Afghan authorities.

Strategic coordination – as distinct from tactical coordination of programmes – entails the streamlining of the policy interests of external actors. Though emerging consensus among the major actors on what constitutes principles of good governance has improved prospects of coordination, divisions remain. In Rwanda, donors were deeply divided over how far they could morally put pressure on the post-genocide government on any governance issue. In Afghanistan, donors are divided on how far to promote human rights and democracy lest they endanger stability. And in the Balkans, Cambodia and Afghanistan, important external actors have diverging interests and priorities. The 'war on terror' has further divided US and European actors on matters of when and how to introduce governance measures in the only two post-9/11 cases so far – Afghanistan and Iraq. There have also been serious divisions among members of the UN Security Council on how to deal with the crisis in Darfur.

The UN Mission in Sudan (UNMIS)<sup>1</sup>, led by SRSG Jan Pronk, is expected to play a key role in peace implementation but there are questions regard-

ing the possible limitations of a unified mission approach under the current UN structure. Still, a coordinated approach will be crucial and, if UNMIS proves insufficient, it may be bolstered by coordination mechanisms whereby actors are required to work within a common operational framework. Experience shows that this is easier to achieve if there is a continuity of key actors (from negotiating stage through implementation stage) and/or if there are groups of 'Friends' to act as a significant source of strategic coordination among bilateral actors and a means by which the SRSG or others may bolster their authority and powers of coordination.

Thirdly, it must be recognised that the reality of peacebuilding and reconstruction in Sudan, as elsewhere, lies in power and politics. Outsiders must be sensitive and not push ahead of the local political dynamics. Even an effective disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration programme requires deep up-to-date knowledge of the political context and its dynamics. Sudan's developmental prospects will depend in large measure on what coalition of interest groups succeeds in dominating the peace and whether this coalition supports progressive economic and social development.

It is generally agreed that the international community has made progress in recent years in its capacity to plan and implement the emergency phase of a peace mission. However, there has been a focus on crisis rather than long-term development and insufficient attention to building capacity. Such weaknesses will need to be minimised or eliminated if peace is to be successfully implemented in Sudan.

In order to develop effective strategies for ending Sudan's various conflicts, one must first understand their complex dynamics and the various interests involved in perpetuating them.

Most importantly, success will primarily depend on the Sudanese themselves assuming major responsibility for the implementation of the CPA, coordination and aid management. The international community must not be seen as interfering too much in policy making and

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day-to-day activities. Appropriate aid can help build peace but inappropriate aid can fuel war and erode rather than enhance local capacity. Coordination, therefore, is not just for external actors to achieve but also for the host government to manage. Sudan must truly 'own' the process. There must be a progressive transfer of technical and political management of aid. This will take time, particularly in the south, and will require great sensitivity and awareness on the part of all those involved in bringing peace to Sudan, Africa's largest and still divided country.

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1. [www.un.org/Depts/dpko/missions/unmis/](http://www.un.org/Depts/dpko/missions/unmis/)

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