

## Prospects for Peace in Darfur

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### Overview

This briefing provides a background to the conflict in Darfur and the prospects for peace. The first part covers the nature of the conflict, dealing with the history of Darfur and the origins and dimensions of the conflict. The second part turns to the international responses, including the efforts to secure a ceasefire and dispatch international peacekeepers, and the Africa Union initiative to secure a peace deal. The final section covers the current situation and the immediate prospects for progress towards peace. It concludes that the existing formulae for peace are unlikely to succeed, but that efforts to broaden the peacemaking exercise hold out opportunities for greater progress.

### Background to the Conflict

Darfur is the westernmost region of Sudan. It straddles the Sahara desert, the dry savannas and the forests of central Africa. Darfur borders Libya, Chad and the Central African Republic and is equidistant from Africa's coasts at the Red Sea and Atlantic Ocean. It is vast—almost as big as Kenya, twice as big as Uganda—and sparsely populated.

The people of Darfur have lived off the land since time immemorial, gaining their livelihoods from cultivating during the rainy season (June-September) and herding animals.

Darfur was an independent sultanate from about 1600 until it became the last large territory absorbed into the British Empire in 1916. At its height, Darfur was one of Egypt's main trading partners—its sultan exchanged letters with Napoleon Bonaparte in 1798. Under the British, Darfur was a stagnant backwater ruled by a dozen colonial officers who delegated most of their powers to tribal chiefs. After Sudan's independence in 1956, Darfur was also neglected, with very little economic development, virtually no roads and the poorest school attendance and health services of all of Sudan. It served as a labour reserve for the vast agricultural schemes of central Sudan.

Darfur literally means “land of the Fur” after the ethnic group that controlled the sultanate and who live in the central part of the region, around the Jebel Marra massif. The Fur, however, comprise no more

than 25% of the population of the region. The largest of the thirty-odd other non-Arab groups that live in Darfur include the Masalit and Zaghawa who, like the Fur, retain their own languages, while speaking Arabic as a lingua franca. Most are traditionally farmers who also keep animals, but several groups—including the Zaghawa of the desert edge—also have a strong tradition of nomadic pastoralism. The term “African” is a recent political coinage to describe these groups.

Darfur’s Arabs migrated across the Sahara desert from the 14<sup>th</sup> to the 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, intermarrying with local people so much that most of them are physically indistinguishable from their non-Arab neighbours. Cattle-herding “Baggara” Arabs predominate in southern Darfur and camel-herding “Abbala” Arabs live in the north, seasonally migrating with their herds from the desert pastures to the central savannas. Darfur also has a long history of immigration from west Africa, and is home to sizeable numbers of Hausa and Fulani whose ancestors came from Nigeria.

Under the sultanate, chiefs from many tribes were awarded feudal land grants known as “hakuras” which remain the basis of Darfurian land tenure today. Certain groups—notably the nomadic Abbala Arabs—did not receive these grants, which has fuelled their hunger for land today, exacerbated by drought and desertification which decimated their herds in the 1970s and ‘80s, forcing many to become farmers.

All Darfurians are Muslims, and most are followers of the Tijaniya Sufi sect that originated in Morocco.

Sudan’s post-independent governments have all been dominated by an elite from Khartoum and its environs, which has controlled business, the administration and the military. The Arab and Islamic orientation of this elite helped provoke rebellions in Southern Sudan among the non-Arab people of that region, mostly Christians and

followers of traditional theistic beliefs. Darfurians were also marginalized in Sudan’s governments, though many joined the army as privates and NCOs.

In 1989, a military coup brought President Omer al Bashir to power. A devout Muslim brigadier, he was overshadowed by Hassan al Turabi, the visionary Islamist who sought to transform Sudan into an Islamic state. Turabi’s militancy exacerbated the war in the South, provoked hostility from Sudan’s neighbours and led to international isolation and sanctions. But many Darfurians followed Turabi, hoping—vainly—that common Islamic faith would be a route to equality.

Bankrupt and exhausted, the Islamists fell out among themselves in 1999, and Bashir removed and jailed Turabi. Determined only to hold on to power, Bashir sought peace in the South, signing the “Comprehensive Peace Agreement” (CPA) with the Southern-based Sudan People’s Liberation Army (SPLA) in January 2005. This accord promises democratic elections and a referendum on self-determination for the Southerners. But the Islamists’ split also drove many Darfurians into opposition.

Darfur regressed into de facto ungoverned status in the 1980s, with the police and local government unable to contain a rising tide of armed robbery and local conflict. Guns became plentiful in Darfur, imported from the civil wars in Southern Sudan and Chad.

The first armed clashes in Darfur occurred in 1987 when a Chadian Arab militia, armed by Libya as part of Colonel Muammar Gaddafi’s attempt to control Chad, was driven across the border into Darfur by Chadian and French forces. This militia, known locally as Janjaweed, allied with drought-stricken Darfurian Abbala nomads, sparking a brief but intense war for land with the neighbouring Fur. Its leader was

Acheikh Ibn Omar, leader of the Conseil Democratique Revolutionnaire, its host in Darfur Musa Hilal, sheikh of the Mahamid Rizeigat tribe.

In 1991, the SPLA tried to instigate rebellion in Darfur but its advance column was decisively crushed by the Sudan army and an Arab militia. Further clashes occurred sporadically through the 1990s, sparked mostly by disputes over land ownership and livestock raiding. The SPLA maintained an interest in Darfur but wasn't able to sponsor a large-scale insurrection there. At no point were the underlying causes of the discontent—Darfur's poverty and marginalization in national life—addressed.

In retrospect, what is surprising is not that war broke out—but that it took so long to do so. Three things stood in the way of insurgency: the decapitation of opposition leadership after the failed SPLA incursion, the loyalty of many Darfurians to the Islamic movement, and the fact that the Chadian president, Idriss Deby, who took power in 1990 with the help of Khartoum, refused to allow Darfurian rebels to operate from his territory.

In 2002, Fur village defence groups were becoming more organized while Zaghawa units were getting arms from their relatives in the Chadian army. With more weapons and encouragement from the SPLA, they formed the Sudan Liberation Army (SLA), and staged raids on government garrisons in February 2003 and announced a manifesto. The SLA's founding Chairman was Abdel Wahid al Nur, a lawyer who espoused a vision of inter-tribal unity and equality of all peoples across Sudan. He is Fur but his supporters include members of all Darfur's tribes—including some Arabs.

From the outset, the Fur-led and Zaghawa-dominated wings of the SLA failed to cooperate. While the SLA of Abdel Wahid had the greater popular support, the Zaghawa wing, led from

2004 by Minni Minawi, was more mobile and militarily aggressive. Capitalizing on Abdel Wahid's disorganized leadership and absence from Darfur traveling the world to drum up international support, Minawi convened a conference in November 2005 at the eastern Darfurian town of Haskanita and had himself elected Chairman, creating an irrevocable split. Thereafter two wings fought each other as often as they fought the government—with Minawi usually the aggressor. In the last year, the SLA command has evaporated, with every field commander operating more-or-less independently, coordinating for specific operations only.

In March 2003, dissident Islamists recently out of power in Khartoum created the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) and joined the SLA's rebellion. Smaller and more cohesive than the SLA, JEM has relied heavily on the base of its leader, Khalil Ibrahim, among the Kobe clan of the Zaghawa.

The Darfur war has made the term "Janjaweed" internationally notorious. The original Janjaweed of the 1980s was a coalition of Chadian Arab militia and a handful of Darfurian Abbala nomads, especially the Mahamid clan. For years, these militia were tolerated and intermittently supported by Khartoum's military intelligence. When the SLA insurrection gathered pace, and especially after the rebels mounted a daring raid on Darfur's main airbase and military headquarters in April 2003, the government turned to the Janjaweed as the vanguard of its counter-insurgency. Using militia was a familiar tactic in the Sudanese civil war dating back to the 1980s—they were cheap and quick to mobilize. The Janjaweed burned, killed and raped their way across the territory of the insurgents, looting what they could and seizing whatever land they coveted.

Most of Darfur's Arabs—including the majority of the big Baggara tribes of south Darfur—didn't join the Janjaweed. But as the war spread

in 2004, military intelligence continued arming sections of tribes and encouraging them to clear their neighbourhoods of suspected rebel supporters. More than two million Darfurians—the great majority of them Fur, Masalit and Zaghawa—fled to displaced camps or became refugees in Chad.

In defiance of a UN Security Council resolution that it should disarm the Janjaweed, the government absorbed large numbers of militia into its army and paramilitary forces. Meanwhile, some Janjaweed forces have become powerful enough to defy the army. Some have also begun raiding the areas in Chad where they originated a generation ago.

### **International Responses**

The Darfur crisis first seized the world's attention in early 2004, just as it seemed that the long-running war and humanitarian crisis in Southern Sudan was drawing towards a close. Due to patient political investment in a peace process in Kenya, a peace agreement for Sudan was at last in sight, and it was almost unbearably tragic for a new disaster to unfold just as the enormous tragedy of Southern Sudan appeared to be coming to an end. For the first six months of 2004, international policymakers dithered as to whether to put the North-South peace process on hold while they focused on Darfur, or to consummate that peace and then turn to Darfur. In the end, they chose the latter—mainly because it quickly became clear that achieving peace in Darfur would take a long time, and no-one wanted to risk the progress made in resolving the war in the South. But in the meantime, the activists' clamour for action on Darfur mounted.

In response to an outcry from human rights activist and Congress, in July 2004 the U.S. State Department mounted an investigation into whether the atrocities in Darfur constituted genocide. The conclusion, announced by Secretary of State Colin Powell on 9 September 2004, was yes. But, to the dismay of activists, Powell

went on to say that this did not entail any change in U.S. policy. Instead, he referred the matter to the UN Security Council which set up its own investigation. This found that there were war crimes and other violations “as heinous as genocide” but said that the evidence did not support the charge of genocide. The Security Council referred the case to the International Criminal Court—which issued its first indictments in 2007.

U.S. activists first laid the genocide charge on the tenth anniversary of the Rwandan genocide, gaining impetus from the world's failure to live up to its promise of “never again.” Certainly, the crimes of the Janjaweed and their backers seem to fit the Genocide Convention definition of acts intended to destroy, in whole or in part, an ethnic, racial or religious group. But major human rights organizations (including Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch) and humanitarian agencies (such as Medecins Sans Frontieres) have refused to use the term. Their analysis is that Darfur is not the determined attempt to wholly exterminate a group, as with the Holocaust and Rwanda, but rather crimes against humanity committed in the course of a cruel counter-insurgency. Rape, massacre and man-made famine are no less crimes when they are not part of a genocidal campaign, they argue. Moreover, if we describe Darfur as genocide, we must do the same for many other ethnic wars and counter-insurgencies, which is clearly against the spirit of the Genocide Convention.

While the U.S. debated the genocide question and funded what quickly became the world's largest humanitarian operation, the African Union took the lead in trying to find a political settlement. Following talks in the Chadian capital N'djamena in April 2004, Khartoum and the rebels agreed to a ceasefire to be monitored by a team of African Union observers. The ceasefire was violated by both sides from the start and the African Union Mission in Sudan (AMIS)

was mission impossible. Its mandate was extended to protecting civilians, but only when they came across attacks during the course of their monitoring tasks. AMIS grew to 7,000, its operations hampered by perennial shortages of funds and fuel.

No western country has seriously contemplated sending its army to invade Darfur and protect its suffering civilians from the depredations of the Janjaweed and other marauders. Primarily as a stratagem to head off pressure from domestic lobbies, in 2005 the White House decided that its priority was to upgrade AMIS to a larger UN force with a Chapter VII mandate—authorized to use force. For the last two months, efforts to impose this force on a reluctant Sudan have consumed most of the diplomatic energies expended on Darfur by the U.S. and Europe. But even a Chapter VII mission is not the intervention that the activists demand: it is still a peacekeeping force and can only operate if there is a peace to keep, and with the consent of both the Sudan government and the rebels. The 20,000-strong force authorized by the UN Security Council in August 2006 was designed to police a peace agreement, not to police Darfur. The same is true for the UN-AU “hybrid” mission recently approved by the UN Security Council.

For months, Sudanese President Omer al Bashir dug in his heels and refused to accept a UN force, even holding out against a hybrid AU-UN force. In November 2006 he conceded an AU force strengthened by UN advisers and logistics. But, with Chinese pressure to comply, Bashir then accepted the hybrid UN-African Mission in Darfur (UNAMID). This is expected to number 26,000 troops and civilian police when at full strength. It will have a “principally African” character. Many Darfurians believe that the UN will be coming to provide wholesale protection, and that most of the troops will be from NATO countries. Their high expectations are unlikely to be met.

The focus on peacekeepers has been sustained at the expense of comparable attention to the process of actually achieving peace. Nonetheless, efforts to reach a peace agreement came tantalizingly close to success in May 2006.

The African Union, supported by the U.S., U.K. and others, held seven rounds of peace talks culminating in a six-month continuous session in the Nigerian capital, Abuja, from November 2005 to May 2006. During those talks, the government sat tight while the rebels scarcely budged from their opening demands. Disunity on both sides impeded any real negotiation. Under pressure from the UN Security Council and especially the U.S.—who demanded a quick settlement in the anticipation that this would lead to Khartoum giving the green light to a UN force—the AU mediation drafted its own compromise proposals and tabled them to the parties on 25 April 2006. Within a week, the Sudanese were expected to read, absorb and agree to 86 pages of complex text on power-sharing, wealth-sharing and security arrangements. Under severe pressure, especially from the U.S., Khartoum and Minawi agreed. JEM’s leader Khalil rejected the package outright. Abdel Wahid—who commanded the greatest support across Darfur—held out, asking for just a handful of further concessions. The text could certainly have been improved in the areas he identified: more compensation for victims of abuses, better guarantees on militia disarmament, and more seats for the rebels in Darfur’s local government.

The proposed Darfur Peace Agreement (DPA) could have worked. But, rather than using the partial agreement as a platform for coaxing the hold-out rebels into the tent, the international community—led by the U.S.—tried to bully them with threats of sanctions. The AU expelled them from the ceasefire commission. What was quite a good agreement on paper was widely rejected across Darfur as an imposed package. Minawi was deserted by most of his

own commanders. Politically, this ham-fistedness killed the DPA.

The aftermath of the DPA saw an escalation in violence in Darfur. Earlier, following the huge government offensives of 2003 and 2004, in which tens of thousands of people had been killed, violence had substantially subsided. In early 2006 there were signs of new outbreaks of fighting, including internecine fighting between rebels (usually instigated by the forces of Minawi) and clashes along the Chadian border, as the Sudan government's attempts to overthrow the Chadian government escalated. After the signing of the DPA, following U.S. and U.N. signals that the parties that refused to sign would be considered "outlaws", the Sudan government launched a series of military offensives. These rapidly fizzled out, but disorder spread in a number of areas. In addition, most of Minawi's commanders refused to accept his decision to sign the DPA, and some of them defected, while those who remained loyal were forced to withdraw from their positions into garrison towns. At the same time, some of the militia armed by Khartoum began to fight on their own account, in several instances turning on one another.

### **Prospects for Peace**

For months after the signing of the DPA, the international partners insisted that it could not be opened for renegotiation and not a word should be changed. Ironically, all the Sudanese parties including the National Congress Party—were far more flexible on that score than the internationals confirming the suspicion that the DPA was not in reality "owned" by the parties but rather imposed on them. From May until August or so, it is likely that rather modest revisions to the DPA would have been sufficient to bring on board Abdel Wahid and the largest of the non-signatory groups. But, just as the internationals began to recognize that they needed to be more flexible, the Darfurian movements became less so. In part

their harder line emanated from the more militant groups, such as JEM, who in turn were influenced by their Eritrean patrons. Eritrea and JEM took the lead in establishing the National Redemption Front (NRF), a coalition of groups opposed to the DPA. Although it possessed a powerful propaganda machine, the NRF never won the backing of most of the non-signatory commanders in Darfur. Another reason why the non-signatory rebels held out was that they were stigmatized and isolated by the AU and UN. Most notably, the AU expelled them from the Ceasefire Commission in August 2006, a mistaken act that did as much to damage the prospects for a real ceasefire as any of the violations of the parties themselves. And the internal rivalries among the non-signatory commanders did much to undermine their cohesion and capacity for engaging in negotiation.

Between November 2006 and April 2007, a large number of the non-signatory commanders convened in Amarai in North Darfur, hoping to convene a meeting at which they would, at minimum, adopt a common approach to negotiating a peace agreement and, at maximum, organize the SLM into a more effective and united political force. It turned out to be a vain exercise. The Sudan government, Chad, Libya and Eritrea were all determined to stop the meeting from going ahead, because if successful, it would have created a Darfur resistance that was powerful and united and answerable only to itself. Some of the Darfurian leaders also opposed the process because it threatened to marginalize them—for example Sharif Harir, veteran opposition leader, and Abdel Wahid al Nur. Meanwhile, those who paid lip service to the need for rebel unity, such as the AU, UN and U.S., did nothing to support the commanders' attempts to forge a way ahead. Only after the commanders had dispersed did the UN begin to consider some sort of serious engagement with them. It was another missed opportunity.

The new peace process is headed by Salim Ahmed Salim (AU) and Jan Eliasson (UN). The two mediators produced a roadmap in May. This had three stages. First, they seek to coordinate the multiple peace initiatives of the AU-UN and the governments of the region (notably Libya and Eritrea). Following a high-level meeting in Tripoli, they have verbal commitments for this unification. Then they plan to assemble the non-signatory rebels and coax them to adopt a common negotiating position. Then the negotiations themselves should begin.

The plan is founded on a number of very optimistic assumptions. First, can the different initiatives truly be aligned?

While the veracity of the AU and UN's commitment to an inclusive peace cannot be questioned, the same does not hold for some of the regional governments involved. For example, the Eritrean initiative is not necessarily pursued in good faith. In the case of Eastern Sudan, it is alleged by some, that Asmara cut a deal with Khartoum whereby it delivered the Eastern Front to the Sudan government in return for certain favours from Khartoum, which have not been publicly specified but which are widely believed to include cash payments and commercial access. It seems highly unlikely that Asmara could be cooperating with Khartoum on the Eastern Front while opposing it in Darfur. Much more likely is that Khartoum and Asmara are working together to find a settlement that delivers the Darfur rebels (under the banner of the NRF or another arrangement convened and controlled by the Eritreans, for example the recently-created United Front for Liberation and Development, which includes five small groups) in such a way that the involvement and influence of the UN and U.S. is severely limited. Eritrea and Sudan may not fully agree on what they want for a peace agreement for Darfur, but they know what they do not want—that Darfur should be run by the Americans. The Libyans have precisely the same aim, to minimize UN and U.S. roles in the future of Darfur. In this

context, it seems likely that the Eritreans will play along with the international peacemaking efforts, but then undermine them if they seem on the point of success.

Second, can the armed movements be unified? While there are powerful sentiments among the rebels in favour of unity, the political infrastructure for unity simply doesn't exist. There is no centralized military command or centralized supply, let alone an organized political party with its mobilization machine, media, etc. Every commander in the SLA is a power unto himself. JEM is more cohesive but has lost most of its influence on the ground. The underlying problem is that the resources on offer—from Khartoum, or from a neighbouring state—are so vastly disproportionate to those that can be mobilized from the Darfurian people, that the material basis for an independent, united rebel movement do not exist. Whenever the Darfurian resistance commanders come into contact with a centre of state power, the most opportunistic of them are ready to cut a deal that undermines their comrades in arms.

Related to this is the question, are the right people at the table? In 2004 and 2005, the AU and its international partners made an arbitrary decision to limit representation in the peace talks to the SLM (two factions) and JEM. Others were excluded, such as the National Movement for Reform and Democracy, on the grounds that the mediators did not want to encourage splits in the existing movements. (NMRD was a breakaway from JEM.) The Arabs were excluded on the grounds that the government represented them. Civilian leaders were not represented because the initial focus was on getting a ceasefire, so only the armed groups were considered relevant. It was a justifiable simplification in order to expedite a deal, and had the movements' leaders exercised greater leadership, it might have worked.

Today, things have changed. While Abdel Wahid continues to claim that he alone represents the SLM, there are many commanders on the ground who do not answer to him. While talk of “fragmentation” may be overstated—the SLM was never united, and most of the fragments are individuals or groups that have cut deals with Khartoum, Asmara or N’djamena—the reality is that every senior commander exercises a great deal of autonomy. More significantly, the claim that the government represents the Arabs no longer holds true. Many Arab groups were always independent, and more and more of them are asserting that independence, even to the extent of making agreements with the rebels. Perhaps most important of all, the internally displaced people are creating a new leadership in the camps, that answers only to itself. If the problems of the displaced are to be resolved, these leaders will need to be involved in any negotiations. While the displaced leaders may have a spirit of solidarity with the field commanders, they have been disappointed in the latter’s political leadership, and will want to ensure that their own interests are directly taken into account.

As time passes, therefore, the rationale for reconfiguring the peace talks will strengthen. A critical point will be the 2009 elections. If these are held in parts of Darfur, and have some credibility, then the newly-elected leaders will possess an immense store of legitimacy.

And lastly, what are the incentives for the government and rebels to actually come to agreement?

Khartoum’s approach can be characterized as “retail politics”, since the state is not a neutral arbiter in local political affairs. The provincial elites of Darfur (and indeed any other periphery of Sudan) have never been sufficiently strong and cohesive to mount a sustained challenge to the centre, without calling upon a neighbouring state for assistance.

For the NCP and the security chiefs, Darfur is a political sideshow. Sudan’s real political processes are internal to Khartoum and between North and South. Questions of national unity and democracy are much more important than any settlement in Darfur. The significance of Darfur lies in the way that it has impacted on Sudan’s international relations, especially the relations with the U.S. In that regard, the real rewards of a peace agreement lie in making a deal with the Americans. Unfortunately, in the last year the communication between Khartoum and Washington DC has collapsed. Neither side trusts the other and each expects to be routinely double-crossed. To make matters worse, the bellicose rhetoric of Democratic presidential contenders, who are advocating military action against Sudan and turning Darfur into a test case of the moral muscle of American politicians, means that Sudan’s leaders fear that relations will only get worse.

Without any trust between the leaders of Sudan and the U.S., the incentives for Khartoum to agree to international proposals are simply absent. On the contrary, President Omar al Bashir is more likely to conclude that he should stand his ground, because any concession he gives will simply lead to more demands from Washington.

Khartoum is also internally divided, with senior figures in the National Congress Party and security agencies also acting as independent power centres. No single figure, including President Omar al Bashir, is powerful enough to make the compromises and sacrifices necessary to achieve a real peace deal. While the current flux continues, Bashir will be strong enough to reject any initiatives, but not strong enough to accept them. In the void, the normal modus operandum of supporting local proxies and crisis management will persist.

For the rebels, the big question is whether the envisaged agreement—a version of the DPA—is robust enough to last. The DPA or any revised

version of it only makes sense as a buttress to the CPA. Its power-sharing provisions—recognized by all informed commentators as the most problematic element—are workable only insofar as the CPA provides a charter for the democratic transformation of Sudan. All the institutions in the DPA and CPA are interim, and all the political positions awarded last only until the 2009 elections are held. One of the reasons why the movements were reluctant to sign the DPA in May 2006 was their lack of confidence in that democratization process. A year on, the CPA is looking more shaky than it was, and the prospects for national unity at the end of the interim period are looking more remote. Darfurians may be skeptical democrats but they are committed unionists, and if they see the CPA as failing—leading to both dictatorship and partition—they have little incentive to join it. Until Darfurians see the CPA as a truly viable enterprise they are unlikely to welcome any version of the DPA.

Moreover, while activists and presidential candidates in the U.S. continue to call for military action, the rebels have a perverse incentive in favour of allowing the situation to remain bad, or even deteriorate. Why sign a deal if by hanging on you may get an American intervention in their favour? High profile international actions only feed the inflated hope of a foreign rescue, and with it, intransigence.

### **The Way Ahead**

For two years, international political and diplomatic attention for Darfur has focused on peacekeeping rather than peacemaking. This has reflected the priorities of the U.S. government, which in turn has been driven by the pressure of activists. For example, during the critical phase of the peace process in early 2006, International Crisis Group devoted about ten times as much effort and attention to UN troops compared to a peace settlement. It is possible that with UNAMID approved and deployed, the international community will now get its priorities straight. However, it may well be that the best opportunities for peace have passed and will not

return.

Nonetheless, the efforts by Salim Ahmed Salim and Jan Eliasson to expand Darfur's peace agreement to include all parties are very welcome. Although it is unlikely that they will achieve their stated aim, they provide a means for remaining in political contact with the non-signatory groups and extending them some political recognition, and can provide the basis for a workable ceasefire. The discussions may also move from the procedural questions to the substantive demands of the non-signatories, providing an overdue opportunity for Darfurians to once again talk about the specific measures needed to achieve a political settlement.

Meanwhile, the timetable for the implementation of the CPA moves ahead. For Sudan as a whole, this is the most important event. Domestically in Sudan, Darfur is secondary to the questions of whether the country remains united or Southern Sudan becomes a separate state, and whether free and fair elections in 2009 result in a truly democratic government. Most Sudanese believe that the impasse in Darfur should not hold hostage these vital national developments. Furthermore, as all previous elections in Sudan have been held during times of war with no voting possible in some constituencies, they argue that it is both technically and politically feasible to conduct elections even while some Darfurian constituencies are out of bounds to the electoral process.

The prospect of partial democratization even while some of armed movements remain outside the tent raises the possibility of civilian stakeholders playing a much more significant role in the peace process, of democratization itself providing a solution to Darfur's crisis. This is a complex and sensitive challenge—elections conducted while fighting continues and large numbers of people remain displaced can be politically contentious. But broadening the peace process and linking it to Sudan's national political transformation holds out the best hope for a settlement to Darfur's conflict.

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