

Fostering Inclusion: Analysis of the IGAD Negotiations

By Muna Khugali, Sudanese Women's Convention

I would really like to be positive today when analysing the IGAD peace process. This optimism is needed because it allows us to see both of the successes and the failures accompanying the IGAD Peace Process. But before I begin my presentation I need to give credit where it is due. The IGAD peace process needs to be commended for the work done so far namely reaching the cease and the general political peace framework known as "Machakos protocol of 20th July 2002", the security arrangement and the wealth sharing agreements. They are still currently negotiating the power sharing and the 3 contested areas i.e. Nuba, South Blue Nile and the Abyei.

In spite of these commendable achievements, the IGAD peace process lost out in not being inclusive, specifically where the women and other marginalised groups in Sudan were concerned. In my presentation therefore I will focus on such groups i.e. the Sudanese women and the Beja people, who were excluded from the IGAD peace process negotiations and framework formulation. The process did not guarantee women and the Beja people the right to attend the negotiations as main partners. We all know that the ending of any conflict starts by bringing all involved parties together, listen to them and engage them in negotiations. Making peace is a mutual process; it cannot be successful if it excludes the parties involved in the conflict. It is my hope therefore that this meeting will engage us in a more practical result oriented discussion and deliberation.

As a woman and in particular as a Sudanese woman and more specifically as a northern Sudanese woman, I find myself ashamed of the historical northern political discourse and its confused identity that has led to the marginalization, discrimination and alienation of most of Sudanese people. I, like many other Sudanese, consider the issue of identity one of the main causes behind the conflict. As a female activist, I am trapped between the advanced rights I legally obtained and enjoyed to great extent since the 1960's and between the deteriorating women's situation in the north. On one hand I am trapped between my concepts of rights, and on the other, between the exclusion I endure because of my gender in practicing and negotiating my rights.

**Sudan at the Crossroads at The Fletcher School
Presentation on March 11, 2004
To reproduce material, conference website must be cited.**

In addition to my confusion there do exist huge differences between northern Sudanese women, especially between the elite and the rest of the women. I have seen the degree of sufferings, exclusion and marginalisation endured by the women especially the Beja women, who in spite of their presence in the north, do not have the same access to their basic rights as I do. The situation of women can also be seen in the Sudanese displaced women who continue to be displaced in their own country.

The Beja people suffer from the impacts of natural disasters, like drought, famine diseases, in addition to their suffering, they live under war, bombardment and displacement. In brief they suffer a hundred percent absence of basic rights. This is not a new situation but definitely seriously worsened by the war and its escalation during the last 10 years.

At one stage, the government of Sudan claimed that the war in the south has been protracted to protect Islam. It was announced as a Jihad, a holy war. I have to tell you, Islam itself has never been a problem in Sudan, but it is the political Islam (Islamic fundamentalism) and Jihad that restarted the war after the 1989 coup. However, the Beja people, who adopt a very strict and conservative Islam, were also fought against, their Khalwa and mosques were bombarded and so were their little villages, leaving behind large number of women, children and elderly dead, injured and displaced, why? They were also Muslims, if the question was Islam!

The Beja people raised their arms because they are exhausted and tired from suffering. They cannot survive and depend forever on the very little relief offered to them from time to time. They need to settle in their villages. They need to feel safe, to receive education in their own language (mainly Bedawit). They need developmental programmes, water, health and educational services, literacy campaigns to raise their awareness. Please take note of the Beja people, even the SPLA people who have suffered all their lives, felt that their suffering was worse!

It is true that IGAD was a necessary step to stop the longest war in Africa. It was important to stop a war that was destroying both the economic and social

**Sudan at the Crossroads at The Fletcher School
Presentation on March 11, 2004
To reproduce material, conference website must be cited.**

infrastructure of the country, which leading to death and displacement of millions of Sudanese in the north and the south. However, we should note that the conflict is not only between north and south, but an expanded engagement of other groups who carried arms against the northern government for the same reason that pushed the SPLA, for instance, the Beja People Congress. We all know that this perception led to the SPLA's qualifying as a main negotiator in the peace process.

The Beja People Congress was formed in 1958 and it is the only organisation that represents the Beja people. It is a member of the National Democratic Alliance, which is an umbrella organisation of about 10 Sudanese political parties, including the SPLA that have fought against the northern government since 1995. We have to understand that the war in Sudan has been against marginalisation that caused exclusion and suffering to most of Sudanese people.

IGAD did not include NDA in the negotiations and as a main partner in the Sudanese conflict it should have been included with the same merit accorded to the SPLA in the peace negotiations. Darfur now is escalating its armed struggle against the government in the north; Darfur also raised the arms to highlight the suffering of its people. Unfortunately arms have been the only means so far to achieve rights, as IGAD so far proved.

Sudanese women, particularly women of political parties and women of civil society organisations are excluded from the peace negotiations. These women have led many activities campaigning for peace and demanded their inclusion in this process. But their screaming voices were intentionally ignored. How can IGAD justify its inclusion of only two bodies from all the conflicting parties and areas to sit alone and come back to us with a convincing peace process?

Men make war and women are the first to suffer, then men come and sit alone to negotiate peace with total exclusion of women. Does this make sense? I am not suggesting here that all women do not have a role in the conflict, some few women do. Some joined the armed struggle and received training (the SPLA/SAF) while some northern Sudanese women, members of National Islamic Front (NIF), supported

**Sudan at the Crossroads at The Fletcher School
Presentation on March 11, 2004
To reproduce material, conference website must be cited.**

the war, by voluntarily taking the military training. Not only that, they also supported the war by giving donations. Female NIFers donated their money and gold to support the holy war in which hundred of thousands of lives were wasted most of them being women and children. Female NIFers also campaigned with all their efforts in defending the war and its cause, by visiting families who lost males in the war to tell them that their sons or husbands or brothers were enjoying life with Hur Ein (“beautiful women in heaven”!)

However, this should not divert us from the fact that men do initiate the war and feed it by using women. War is also about domination, each party wants to dominate and show power during it. Women and children are the victims of this situation, even when many children carry the weapons and fight; they do that because they are also under the domination of men. In order to limit the domination of men, all people should have been given the opportunity to participate in IGAD peace process.

Women should have been included in negotiations; it was not enough to bring one or two women representing those who are in the authority, in order to claim that women were included!! Peace negotiations that exclude the representative parties are considered a continuation of war and conflict. The co-operative and inclusive approaches that characterise the ideal of conflict resolution were absent and the needs of 'ordinary people' were denied. The negotiations up to now show the strength of the powerful parties with total marginalisation to the powerless.

The IGAD process did not provide an inclusive agenda for the interim period. Up to now every thing seems to be about wealth (oil), power and men. On their early days they talked about the issue of democracy, the rule of law, displacement and refugees, now we hear nothing about these issues. The six years of the interim period did not tell us much about the arrangements concerning the interim period. Issues like security, constitutional rights of Sudanese were not clear. We only heard of a debate about how the “Sharia” will remain in the north, or how the capital could be transferred somewhere else. Of course if the Sharia remains in north, the south would definitely work for separation. But do all Muslims accept the application of Sharia? What about southerners who live in the north and are subject to Sharia laws? The

**Sudan at the Crossroads at The Fletcher School
Presentation on March 11, 2004
To reproduce material, conference website must be cited.**

process is also not clear on when the emergency laws will be lifted or how we, the Sudanese can use the interim period to include what IGAD process did not discuss.

The challenge facing Sudanese, in particular women, is huge and needs the support of the international community, because the interim period remains the only opportunity now to create a lasting peace in Sudan. The period must witness public participation, the kind of public participation that will allow people to feel that they are part of the process and must work for its success and protect it.

Having talked about inclusion, it is equally important to talk about ownership. People must feel that they own the peace process, it for their benefit and that they are the stakeholders. Dealing with Sudanese from a superior position would not help in creating a peaceful atmosphere. The causes behind the conflicts are compounded by such attitudes.

The problem of the Beja people and Darfur must be dealt with. This implies that their issues must be addressed now and the interim period must guarantee the inclusions of women and of these groups in all activities. In principle, all groups that suffer marginalization should participate in the interim period agenda.

We need to bring victims, including women, out of their suffering, to find solutions for them to start their lives, to give them the space to play their role in their societies by taking part in peace building.

The support of international community during the interim period is very essential, to make sure that all agreements are addressed and fully adopted; issues like constitution, security, election, and international laws must be dealt with immediately. The interim period will not lead to peace if these agreements are not fully adopted. People will have different stands and approaches towards the violations they endured during the last decades. Accountability for these violations is the only guarantee that will bring hope and peace to the people of Sudan.