An Unstable Ecosystem:
Reflections on Conflict and Arms in Sudan

Address by
Robert Muggah

At the
ICES Auditorium
June 22, 2007

International Centre for Ethnic Studies, Colombo

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Introduction

More than eight thousand years ago, there were rumours of a marshy and arid territory called 'Cush' that stretched from Nubia all the way to 'upper Egypt'. The earliest documented records of this 'Cush' emerged from Egyptian hieroglyphics and described it, in a word, as 'wretched'. Several thousand years later, the Old Testament (Isaiah 18:7) later characterised its people as 'tall and smooth-skinned, feared far and wide, an aggressive nation of strange speech, whose land is divided by rivers'. It added ominously (psalm 68:31) that one day, 'envoys will come from Egypt: Cush will submit herself to God'. The Old Testament was right in at least one respect. Envoys did come from Egypt. Repeatedly.

Sudan, for all intents and purposes, was made a protectorate of Egypt for the next two thousand years. Newly converted Muslim raiders first invaded Coptic Nubia from Egypt, for gold and slaves in the seventh century. Despite putting up a stiff resistance, these early Sudanese were conquered 600 years later by a better armed Egyptian force. A sultanate was installed around the fifteenth century and divided thecountry into respective 'tribal' homelands – or dar – for the Fur to the west, the Dinka to the south and the Beja to the east. Under Ottoman command, the Egyptians administered Sudan for much of nineteenth century during which time they installed the capital in Khartoum.

International interest in Sudan was motivated at first by the economic and moral issues of the day: trade and slaves. The British opened the Suez Canal in 1869 – a key thoroughfare to India and the 'Orient'– and were spreading their influence in the region. Great Britain, France and Belgium were also growing increasingly worried about the

creeping influence of the Ottomans in the horn of Africa. Using control over the headwaters of the White Nile and the burgeoning anti-slavery movement as a pretext, the Anglo-Egyptian army invaded Sudan under Lord Kitchener. The Sudanese were decimated. As many as 11,000 Khalifa soldiers were killed in comparison to just 48 Anglo-Egyptian infantry. The difference, it seems, was in the caliber of their weapons. Great Britain ruled what would be called 'the Sudan' until independence in 1956.

As newly liberated states emerged across Africa during the 1950s and 1960s, international and regional interest in Sudan expanded. But with independence also came war. Sudan's 600 ethnic groups faced all-out war for more than 50 of the next 60 years. These wars were unbelievably complex. Wars were waged by the Arab Muslim northerners against the black Animist Dinka and Nuer near the world's largest swamp (the Sudd) in the south; the Muslim black fur in their arid homelands of Darfur; and impoverished Arab Muslim easterners bordering Ethiopia. By the late 1960s and early 1970s – Ethiopia, Uganda, Kenya and Zaire along with a growing Sudanese Diaspora in Europe, North America and the Middle East – were sending arms back into the country. Khartoum, for its part, was armed by the Soviet Union and Egypt. As I will later explain, Chad, Libya, Eritrea, China, Iran, Saudi Arabia and others became involved.

At around the same time, Sudan began listing toward fundamentalist Islam. Shari'a was imposed by Khartoum after a string of coups. In the wake of famines and popular unrest, in June 1989 lieutenant general Umar Hassan Ahmad al Bashir together with the leader of the Egyptian-backed Northern Islamic Front (Turabi) successfully took control. They were odd-bedfellows, but then many of the alliances in Sudan were formed by university friendships – something the outside world seems not to grasp.

By the mid-1990s Sudan was home to Al' Qaeda training camps and a host of 'terrorist' cells working throughout the Middle East and the Horn of Africa. By the twenty first century, Sudan was known only for its oil and for its genocide.

Sudan did ultimately submit herself to God as predicted in the Old Testament. The only hitch was the God received by this nation of strange speech wasn't the one that most people expected.

So why this abbreviated excursion into history?

For one, it is a reminder that, like Sri Lanka, Sudan's history is about as long as it is complex. It also reveals how ostensibly contemporary 'peace and security' issues – including terrorism and gross human rights violations – preoccupied nineteenth and twentieth century minds alike. More fundamentally for today, it is to recall that Sudan is part of a fragile ecosystem. Its bad neighbours affect the domestic situation. Its equally repressive politics have engendered a fragile 'internal ecosystem'. As in Sri Lanka there are not, and never have been, easy answers in hastening an end to war or forging sustainable peace. It begs a certain measure of humility, and most certainly certainly caution.

While on the subject of the Bible, let me make a few solemn disclaimers and admissions of my own. I'm not a Sudan specialist. Nor am I a Sri Lankan expert. Although I've spent some time in various countries in the Horn of Africa and in Sudan, I claim little expertise. In fact I don't like the word 'expert' at all. My own modest insights are derived from diverse experience researching and working on war, violence, disarmament and displacement over the past decade, and on listening to people who know much better than I.

Overview

There are a few basic themes I'd like to consider today. My expectation is to paint a very broad canvass. I'm assuming that most of you have not been to Sudan so will be giving a general overview. I may alludeoccasionally to some basic parallels between Sudan and Sri Lanka – but these are going to be tenuous. It is always dangerous (and potentially disingenuous) to make comparisons between different places. In the case of Sudan, the current regime is fundamentalist Muslim and the armed groups are alternately Christian (in the south) and moderate Muslim (in Darfur). As you know in Sri Lanka, we confronted with a majoritarian Sinhalese Buddhist government and minority Hindu Tamil and Muslim populations. I won't cross this bridge. As it is, I've set myself a prodigious task.

First I'll be taking a very quick tour of the international and regional dynamics shaping Sudan's fragile ecosystem. Acknowledging the influence of international players, but also Sudan's nine neighbours, is crucial. Oil – that perennial resource curse –only recently lubricated violence. The war on terror, the rise and fall of international Jihadism, the influence of Western evangelicals, power-politics and cross-border ethnic tensions are equally significant factors.

Second, I'll turn to the country's internal conflicts. I will begin first with the long-running north-south war that recently ended following a comprehensive peace agreement (CPA) in 2005. I'll then briefly turn westward to the festering violence in Darfur and the failed peace agreement (DPA) in 2006. A third war, one waged by the so-called 'Eastern Front' is also important to mention, though I won't dwell on this. I will end by highlighting a fourth conflict – far from the media's glare - fought between tribes and over land and pasture and threatening to unravel deals crafted elsewhere.

Third, I will consider two peace agreements – one still holding in the South and another that patently "failed" in Darfur. I don't want to juxtapose these two agreements too strongly, as they each have intense limitations and critics. I'll talk a little about their origins and draw attention to some of the extraordinary challenges in relation to implementation.

I will conclude with a few reflections on the lessons emerging from the process. There are hundreds, but I'll be restricting myself to few that are germane to the Sri Lanka situation. The international community has much at stake in the Sudan. Social scientists often refrain, on the basis of repeated failures, from offering predictions. Nowhere are the perils of prophecy more dangerous, I would argue, than in relation to the Sudan. But if the Bible is anything to go by, I've got a least a few thousand more years to be proved wrong.

International and regional perspectives

In the early years of independence, Sudan was politically influenced by Egypt, Libya and to a lesser extent, the Arab League. But as a proxy during the Cold war, it was also economically beholden to the US and the Soviets. By the 1990s the country was alternately at war or peace with most of its nine neighbours. What must be recognised is the extreme fluidity of the political, military and security environment in the Horn of Africa region. In international relations speak – Sudan is an extremely fragile state in a very bad neighbourhood. The old Arabian proverbs of 'keeping your friends close, but your enemies' closer' or 'the enemy of my enemy is my friend' could just as easily be Sudanese. Come to think of it, they probably originated in Sudan! Let me touch on the implications of this bad neighbourhood for war- and peace-making.

First, Sudan is fragile but so are its neighbours. Part of the paradox of a 'bad neighbourhood' is that many of your neighbours are often as unstable - or even more so - than you are. All of the countries in the Horn have variously collapsed, imploded and been taken over by military dictatorships at one time or another since independence. These included Uganda (1979, 1986), Chad (1980s, 1991, 2006), Ethiopia (1970s, 1991, 1998), Somalia (1991), the Congo (1990s, 2000) and more recently Eritrea and Central African Republic. Catastrophic wars have been waged between them – including Ethiopia-Eritrea in 1998-2001 (70-120,000 killed) and more recently Ethiopia's foray into Somalia to disband the Islamic Courts. Bad neighbourhoods are bad for the international community. In most cases state implosion (and war) is partly due to the meddling of neighbours. This leads to the next problem.

Second, there are literally hundreds of armed groups in Sudan and in the region. There is a tendency in many conflicts (Iraq, Sri Lanka, Colombia, Lebanon) to reduce the conflict to legible sides – a kind of binary equation. This simplification is important for 'packaging' the conflict to outsiders. In Sudan – it's traditionally been cast as a warbetween Muslim government (bad) and Christian rebels (good), or Arab militia (bad) against pastoral civilians (good). But the reality isinevitably much more complicated. The US, for one, has acknowledged this complexity for some time. The US Special Forces have been running operations in the Sahel since the 1993 Somalia debacle in search of 'terrorist' operatives. They supported the Ethiopians in killing several hundred suspected terrorists on the Somali-Kenya border and their recent invasion and occupation of Somalia. They are now setting up a major African Command to organise all of

their forces on the continent. The Pentagon refers to the Horn of Africa as the 'second front' on the war on terror (after the Middle East). Thee armed groups in the region can be divided into Sudanese armed groups in Sudan, foreign armed groups on Sudanese soil and Sudanese armed groups in neighbouring countries. These groups collude, but they also fight amongst themselves. Added to these are government-sponsored militia – such as the Janjaweed in Darfur or the home-guard militia in the south. Getting a handle on these armed groups (there command and control, sources of arms, and relative influence) is a major challenge.

Third, the 'spill-over' or contagion effects and 'blow-back' of bad neighbourhoods and armed groups are potentially devastating. The most common symptoms of spill-over include apocryphal influxes and outflows of refugees. UNHCR estimates that the Sudan, Uganda, Somalia, Chad and Congo are among the top ten refugee-producing states in the world. They also report the highest internally displaced populations in the world.

In addition to refugees and IDPs – there is also a massive increase in arms flows across borders. These spill-over effects have consequences. They result in general militarization and recruitment for armed groups in or near refugee camps. This partially explains why asylum policy in the region is in retreat. In some cases these groups launch attacks against Sudan with the support from their hosting state – as we've seen for over a decade in the case of Uganda. At worst, this 'blow-back' can unsettle an entire country – many in the region are on the verge of imploding.

Sudan's four conflicts

So what are the implications of all this international and regional jostling for Sudan? For one, it has fueled catastrophic wars between Khartoum and its southern, western and eastern peripheries. Despite the many difficulties of obtaining reliable data, even the most conservative estimates are breath-taking. Also, because of the influence of its neighbours, conflicts in Sudan are seldom resolved but rather diffuse from place to place – as I'll explain in a moment.

Southern conflict: All-out-war first broke out between the Arab Muslim north and black-African Animist/Christian south even before independence (1956) and lasted until 1972. With the introduction of an Islamicization campaign by then-Sudanese President Nimeiry in 1983, and against a backdrop of simmering south-south tribal tensions, the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) re-launched the war in the early 1980s. After more than two decades of bloodshed and four different northern regimes, the war ended in a comprehensive peace agreement (CPA) in 2005.

The CPA came after years of negotiation in Sudan, Kenya and Tanzania. As I'll describe later, the peace agreement included provisions for an internationally-monitored ceasefire, power-sharing and access to the oil fields (discovered in the 1990s), the separation of religion and state, a referendum on independence and a separate army. These were major demands of the SPLA. A UN Mission (called 'UNMIS') was deployed with several thousand troops, observers and aid programmes to support the new government of south Sudan.

I cannot overestimate the human tragedy of these 2 wars: they beggar belief. There were an estimated 2.5 million Sudanese - mostly southerners - killed. The US government in fact accused Sudan of genocide in the South back in 2002 – an ominous prelude to Darfur. The north-south war alone generated more casualties than those in Sri Lanka, Angola, Bosnia, Chechnya, Kosovo, Liberia, Iraq (1991), Sierra Leone, Somalia and Rwanda combined. An astounding four million Sudanese - out of a population of around 29 million - were made homeless – many of them as refugees but many more as internally-displaced people living in the slums of Khartoum.

Darfur conflict: Meanwhile, beginning in earnest in mid-2003, a rag-tag armed group in western Darfur responded to growing militia-attacks sponsored by Khartoum. Unlike in southern Sudan, all them were Muslim and the rebellion quickly spread across Darfur's three states. Media accounts initially portrayed the violence there as a struggle between African farmers and Arab herdsmen over land/water. But as many would later find out, its root causes actually lie in Khartoum's repressive and exploitative relations with the periphery.

The main culprit included the Janjaweed ('devils on horseback'), themselves recruited and armed by the Government of Sudan. The Janjaweed – mostly camel-herding Arabs from the Abbala tribe –

unleashed hell against the Fur, Zaghawa and Massaleit groups that make up the populations of Darfur. These so-called Janjaweed were basically repackaged militia from the north-south conflict. The first use of the so-called 'self-defence groups' emerged in mid-1980s against the SPLA.

The government's support of the Janjaweed in Darfur is the most visible and highly publicised, but by no means sole, example of a long trend. As I'll explain later, a Darfur Peace Agreement (DPA) was signed in 2006 but the process was fatally flawed.

The costs of this short intense war were terrifying: with estimates ranging-up to 450,000 thousand dead and over 1.8 million displaced. Ongoing surveillance suggests that the death rate is about 15,000 a month, though these numbers are widely contested. The US Congress labeled it 'genocide' in 2005, though the UN Security Council is paralysed to act (owing to Russian and Chinese vetoes). With the situation spiraling out of the control and a supremely under-resourced African Union Mission (AMIS) unable to keep the peace, the UN Security Council approved a large UN peacekeeping force (23,000) to support the African troops. Khartoum has stonewalled this until recently. Only last week a possible hybrid force was approved – with China, Pakistan and India slated to provide some troops – but it will be grounded until at least mid-2008.

Eastern conflict. Lost in the attention paid to wars in the South and Darfur is a third conflict. Simmering resentment amongst the Beja people in eastern Sudan due to their limited democratic representation resulted in newly-formed armed groups launching attacks against Khartoum in the mid 1990s. With backing from Eritrea, they presented only a limited threat. In 2005 they a new group was formed – the Rashaida Free Lions, and later the Eastern Front. They began a more concerted campaign threatening to destabilise oil pipelines in Port of Sudan and elsewhere.

The East was not so very different from that of Sudan's otherperipheries being marginalized politically, exploited economically and neglected every which way. The Muslim Beja – one of the largest ethnic groups in Sudan (2.4 million) – were notoriously impoverished. In a dramatic reversal, the Eritreans brokered a peace deal between the Eastern Front and Khartoum in October 2006 in Asmara. Facing

the looming prospect of war with Ethiopia, Eritrea likely wanted to avoid antagonising its neighbour even more. The agreement was much less robust than that agreed in the south, and despite provisions for wealth sharing, excluded many minority ethnic groups. The situation in the east remains precarious – though no where near the scale of the south or Darfur.

Tribal conflict: There is a fourth war, one that is seldom discussed, that involves widespread militarization, cattle rustling, slave-trading and raids that take on 'conflict-like' proportions. It is not debated because there are no clear factions involved (and thus no lobbying) and

cannot be neatly packaged for outside consumption. Long-enduring tensions between the Darfurian pastoral and agriculturalist groups, between the Southern Dinka and Nuer, and many others in the east regularly simmer-over into bloody encounters. These are also inter-meshed with foreign and domestic armed groups. Khartoum's policy of divide et impera since the 1990s has reaped extraordinary dividends over the years (to the extent that most Sudanese armed forces never fight – using tribal proxies instead). Many of these tribal conflicts developed a new dynamic in and of themselves precisely because of the introduction of new firepower – a subject that I know much about, but will not dwell on today.

Peace-making in Sudan

With all of this turmoil, what are the prospects for peace in Sudan, and indeed the region? Before I turn to this topic, let me quickly trace over the geopolitical backdrop, as this is a hugely important factor when thinking through options for managing conflict. These layers of influence are overlapping and I think we ignore them at our peril.

As I mentioned, before the emergence of the US-Soviet confrontation, the Europeans and Egyptians were heavily involved up until the second world war. But during the 1980s, and with support of client states in the Gulf, the US began pumping significant military and development aid into Sudan (more than USD2billion in the 1990s). Though the US sold the war as a struggle of oppressed Christians, the real prize was to stave off the influence of communism and latent

Islamic fundamentalism being exported by the Muslim brotherhood from Egypt and Libya.

There was a qualitative shift in the late 1980s and 1990s largely in reaction to growing 'terrorism'. The US and Europeans saw in the attempts to create a new caliphate, a danger presented by Bin Ladin (Al Queda) and the rise of fundamentalism within Sudan after a series of coups brought the National Islamic Front to power. Sudan's support for Iraq during the 1991 Gulf War sealed its fate. The peak of this US 'crusade' occurred in the late 1990s with the US missile-strike against a pharmaceutical factory in Khartoum (against a backdrop of the Lewinsky scandal simmering away in the US).

Meanwhile, another factor was looming that would shape the landscape –figuratively and literally – for the next decade. At the dawn of the millennium, commentators dubbed the new century as the 'energy century'. China, and behind the scenes Malaysia, UK and Canada – saw in Sudan enormous potential in its untapped reserves. There was oil in Sudan. Lot's of it. Oil production was reaching 500,000 barrels a day in 2001 (or US$ 7 to 11 billion a year). The Sudanese government spent about USd1million a day from this windfall on prosecuting the war in the south. It spends at least as much prosecuting the war in Darfur. Crucially, both Southern and Darfurian rebels have laid claims in areas where oil is located.

The South Sudan Comprehensive Peace Agreement

Against this backdrop, it seemed that the time was ripe for a peace agreement between the North and South. In fact, the government of Sudanand the SPLA had repeatedly attempted to make deals during the 1980s and 1990s, but these frequently dissolved before the ink was dry. Brokered by Kenya and the US, among others, the comprehensive peace agreement (CPA) came as a major victory by the commander of the SPLA, John Garang, himself a Christian from the Dinka tribe.

It is worth mentioning that the SPLA was itself divided over the future of the South – Garang wanted a degree of unity and others were pushing for complete independence. Though he later died in an airplane crash, his view prevailed. He observed at the signing ceremony that "we have reached the crest of the last hill in our tortuous ascent to the heights of peace. There are no more hills ahead of us, the remaining is flat ground". Perhaps in looking high, he failed to see the gaping hole that the CPA was careening toward.

The CPA resulted in a massive deployment of UN peacekeepers, an immediate ceasefire, withdrawing of government and SPLA troops and a temporary government of national unity. But while the deal was neither comprehensive nor peaceful, it was better than anything else the country had seen in the previous four decades. Let me quickly signal its key provisions.

Independence: After a long tradition of discrimination and despite palatable mistrust, a central provision of the CPA was a referendum on outright independence within six years (2011). This would allow for Southern Sudanese to make a "choice" on whether to secede or to stay within the federation. With Garang dead, there is every indication that most in the South will want to opt for separation – and every reason to believe that the North will do everything in its power to keep this from happening.

Armed forces: The CPA included provisions for the creation of separate armed forces in the north and south and the withdrawal of 91,000 northern troops within 2.5 years. The SPLA, for its part, had 8 months to withdraw its forces. The formation of so-called joint integrated units (21,000 – half from the SPLA and half from the government) was also called for in the six year interim period before the referendum. These JIUs were to be deployed to disputed (oil) areas. If the south does not secede, the CPA calls for these JIUs to be made permanent and converted into a standing army of 39,000 soldiers.

Oil Wealth: The CPA was straightforward when it came to the oil: it proscribed a 50-50 wealth sharing agreement between the Government of Sudan and the SPLA. But crucially, the two 'economic' ministries concerned with managing oil resources (finance and mining) were assumed by the Government, suggesting that oil-sharing protocols will only partially be adhered to.

Territory: Another fundamental challenge relates to the demarcation of the Northern and Southern territorial areas. The CPA did not clarify this. In fact, a major challenge relates to establishing official boundaries: the government refused even to set up a commission. Despite existence of territorial precedents in 1956 (independence)

and Machakos Protocol (2002), this is a major issue that may unravel the peace.

Other issues: A range of other grievances were also addressed by the CPA. These included 'economic issues' (the creation of a dual banking system with pounds in the north and dinars in the south); 'administration' (with positions in the transitional government split 70:30 between the government and the SPLA – Bashir head of state and an SPLA member vice president. There were problems as the interior ministry was still run by the north, meaning that human rights, press freedoms, and political expression are still repressed), 'religion' (with Shari'a applicable in the north and constitutional amendments ensuring that it did not apply to non-Muslims throughout Sudan) and 'symbols' (separate flags for north and south).

Not surprisingly, the CPA faces many major problems. Let me quickly touch on a few of these that might be germane to the Sri Lankan situation.

Exclusion: The CPA was not comprehensive – it actively excluded certain key parties. While it resolved many of the grievances of the black Dinka population (who make up the majority and dominate the SPLA), it excluded others who are largely Nuer. In other words, the CPA solved a geopolitical issue (war and territory), but did not do so in a democratic fashion. Land and treasure was distributed, but key population groups were left out. These excluded groups are angry, and many are still part of militia who are armed to the teeth.

Capacity gaps: After a devastating war that left the northern parts of Sudan largely untouched, there are enormous capacity gaps in the south. Put another way, there is a tremendous divide between what the CPA sets out to do, and what the southern SPLA government is able to actually achieve. Absorption capacities for the promised oil windfalls are limited. There is a huge diaspora that are not necessarily eager to return. Corruption is rife. There is a danger that if the peace dividend is not realised, and fast, war could resume once more.

Ceasefire violations: As is typical of any post-conflict situation, there is a considerable level of violence that persists after the signing of an agreement. A major incidence occurred in November 2006 (in which over 150 were killed). While 'peace' in a political sense persists, the reality is very different. The international community seems content with this 'no-war/no-peace' scenario, but discontent is growing on the ground. There are also dangers of the Darfur conflict spilling over into the south – a fear that keeps most diplomats in the region awake at night. It is to the subject of Darfur that I now turn.

Dafur Peace Agreement

The Darfur Peace Agreement (DPA) was reached after three years of genocide and decades of repression. Following six rounds of talks, on May 2006 the Government of Sudan and one Darfurian rebel group (SLA-Minawi) signed the deal in Abuja, Nigeria. It emerged after intense pressure from the international community. But like many agreements before it, it became quickly apparent to all that the DPA was doomed to fail.

So what happened? Under the auspices of the African Union, the US and the UK, the government of Sudan negotiated the DPA with the primary rebel groups – the SLM and the JEM. The international players were ready to go. But in Nigeria, it was clear that most of the Sudanese parties were neither prepared nor interested in talking. Mediators involved in the talks have described how during closed sessions they repeated demands, traded accusations and sought to sway the mediators. No attempt was made to identify common ground. According to mediator's I've spoken with, no bargaining took place. It was a train wreck from the start.

There were at least four reasons for the failure of the DPA: (i) intense mistrust, hatred and suspicion between parties; (ii) the rebels were themselves divided – alternately fighting each other and the government's Janjaweed; (iii) the power asymmetries between the rebels and the government actually exacerbated tensions and ratcheted up the fear of the rebels of being outmaneuvered; and (iv) most of the rebels saw the battlefield as the real arena of negotiation and the peace talks as stalling tactic.

Frustrated by the lack of progress and intense violence, and against mounting international concern to 'do something', the AU and its international partners issued deadline after deadline to conclude a

deal. By late April 2006, the AU issued a 'take-it-or-leave-it' deal, and parties were given a week to comprehend and debate a 90pg English language document. The ultimatum was unrealistic and impractical – with parties disagreeing on most security, political and economic issues listed in the draft. In fact, the text was not even made available in Arabic – the lingua franca of rebel negotiators – until 2 days before the deadline.

It was the international community and not the rebels or government of Sudan that ultimately made the deal. At the eleventh hour behind the scenes, there was furious pressure applied by Nigeria's President Obasanjo, Deputy Secretary of State Robert Zoellick and British Secretary of State Hillary Benn. Desperate for some success, one of the factions was forced into signing prematurely – warned that if they did not, its leadership would be personally held up for UN sanctions. But the distinctions between getting parties to sign a deal and obtaining genuine commitment for implementation were lost in the deluge. For all their commitment, the international community did not actually provide adequate funds for the peace deal. Instead, a small number of donors provided grants retroactively and warned of funds drying up if no accord was reached. Deadline diplomacy itself was both 'the' strategy, and its outcome.

Immediately after signing the DPA, thousands of Darfurians took to the streets in protest. The UN Special Representative – Jan Pronk – warned it was going to collapse. The text was nice enough, but it simply did not resonate with Darfurians. Indeed, the DPA had important provisions: it called for no-fly zones, protection of IDPs, demilitarized supply routes, buffer zones and a three phased process of rebel-military disengagement and a final status of forces (including integration of rebels, demobilisation and a security arrangements commission). But it only partially accounted for compensation of victims, had weak monitoring of the Janjaweed disarmament, limited protection for returning refugees, and other major problems.

The DPA was dead on arrival. Within a few weeks, the rebel signatory (who's leader was serving as a special adviser to President Bashir) formed an offensive military alliance. The rebel groups immediately began to splinter. By September 2006 several major offensives were launched and the number of people in need of emergency aid swelled from one to four million. During my last visit about 4 months ago, access had more or less been shut down and the conflict was spilling over into Chad and CAR at enormous cost. The African peacekeepers were ineffective, unable even to defend themselves, let alone others. The creation of a hybrid UN-AU force has been resisted until last week – but few believe it will get off the ground until late 2008.

Lessons

Magic bullets? There is no single magic bullet to deal with Sudan'sfragility – whether in Darfur, the south or the east. What is clear isthat military options did not work to foment peace. These are long-term and systemic problems of regional and ethnic inequality and discrimination that will continue to grow worse if they're not worked on now. Ceasefires and peace-deals are of course essential – but they open the door – it is important that they are followed-through and used as a vehicle for redressing systemic grievances. One of the lessons of Sudan – particularly in the South – is not to let perfection become the enemy of the good: no deal will be perfect, but however imperfect, it is often better than the alternative.

African solutions for African problems? In Africa, as elsewhere, most peace agreements signed in foreign countries end up falling apart when they are implemented at home. This is because those parties that sign them are frequently unaccountable and unchallenged. Any peace deal must also take into account African problems when thinking through African solutions. Sudan is in a bad neighbourhood. Its neighbours have long destabilised the country and vice versa. Guarantees from neighbouring states to resist intervention are essential if peace agreements in Darfur, the East or the South are going to work.

International coherence? A major factor contributing to instability in Sudan are the divergent interests between key players. Crucially, the UN Security Council is paralysed over Sudan because of Chinese and Russian oil and military interests, but also the US and European unwillingness to deploy the necessary forces. China and Russia must become strategic partners in weighing on Khartoum. China in

particular is crucial to the success of sanctions and giving Khartoum a face-saving way out.

Ensure space for genuine dialogue? As unpalatable as it may be to the Sudanese government or armed groups, they have no other choice but to talk, identify solutions, and select meaningful entry-points for reconciliation. The problem with the International Criminal Court (ICC), as well as 'mega-phone' and 'deadline' diplomacy in the past, is that itforced zero-sum outcomes, as well as concessions from the constituents of armed groups without adequate consultation. This led to deals that simply were not genuine deals.

Negotiated settlement and sustained commitment? There is no viable alternative to a negotiated settlement among parties of a conflict. There must be a consistent diplomatic engagement, artificial deadlines need to be avoided, international actors should play a facilitative role rather than a proscriptive role, and inclusivity should be encouraged. Quick fix interventions not only fail, they undermine international credibility and legitimacy, reduce the effectiveness of repeat interventions, and can contribute to a worsening of the situation as the case of the DPA shows.

Bring rebel groups into a common position? The 'relative' success of the SPLA was due to their ability to define a common agenda. Like the LTTE, the SPLA did it by force (wiping out or buying-out their opposition). By way of contrast, the Darfurian rebel groups failed to do this. In an ironic twist, the European Union and the US iare trying to support the Darfur rebel groups to come to common view. This seems to be essential to creating an even negotiating position and consolidating deals – but is also risky.

Peacekeeping first? There is an obsessive preoccupation with deploying peace keeping and hybrid forces in Sudan. This is what dominates the international media and UN debates. They are of course crucial for monitoring ceasefire violations, but there limits must be also recognised. Unless adequate political will is mobilised, they will be crippled for lack of troops and funds. Because of the unbelievable logistical constraints, they may not be able to stem the real threats on the ground. What they can do is build confidence – something that is crucial in Darfur. While peace-keeping is essential, we need much much more than this.

Ceasefire commissions? The role of ceasefire commissions is crucial. Monitoring violations and discussing them in higher order forum, should be used to encourage public and diplomatic pressure on offenders.

Identify local capacities for peace? There are no statutory laws in the south and meager law and enforcement in the rest of the country. The reality is that local security arrangements – from tribal councils, neighbourhood watch groups and customary laws – are likely the most realistic practical interventions in the foreseeable future. Some of them may offend liberal sensibilities – but they are often the most credible institutions to reducing violence.

Despite a decade of hand-wringing over the failure to intervene in Rwanda in 1994 and despite Washington's decision to break its own taboo against the use of the word 'genocide', the international community has once more proved slow and ineffective in responding to large-scale, state-supported killing.

I will end this lecture by stating the obvious. The current inability of the international community to militarily intervene, much less curb armed violence on a grotesque scale, reveals the limitations of the now famous responsibility to protect doctrine. It is worth recalling that Sudan's challenges are not limited to a single country – but to many. While Khartoum is the core perpetrator, a military intervention would likely only temporarily stay a re-descent into violence in the absence of more profound political changes in the region. Pragmatic solutions are required – regional approaches, inclusive dialogue, international coherence, the strategic use of carrots and sticks are what will ultimately prevail.