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Canada's goal is ensuring peace, stability

By Deepak Obhrai

Sudan's peace process, as laid out in the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement, ended decades of civil war between the northern and southern parts of the country and is at a critical juncture.

While the fragile agreement has been tested previously, it faces its greatest challenge in the coming months. According to the terms of the CPA, Sudan must hold two referenda in January 2011: one on the separation of Southern Sudan and one on whether the border region of Abyei will join the north or the south.

Preparations for the southern referendum are behind schedule and those for Abyei have not begun. The peace and stability of Sudan, Africa's largest country, and its 11 neighbours are at stake. Sudan cannot be forgotten or ignored. Prime Minister Stephen Harper, Foreign Affairs Minister Lawrence Cannon and I have been actively engaged and concerned about the peace process.

Canada has played and continues to play an important role in encouraging peace and stability in Sudan. While it is up to the Government of Sudan and the Government of South Sudan to respect the CPA, Canada is very active in Sudan and a leader in the international community on Sudanese issues. The overarching goal of our government's engagement is the promotion of sustainable peace in Sudan and in the neighbouring countries.

We believe that implementing the CPA is critical to ensuring such a peace. We also consider it essential that the 2011 referendum processes be credible, with results that cannot be contested and do not themselves give rise to conflict.

As part of our ongoing commitment, we are funding upgrades to the Southern Sudan Police Service, thereby increasing the service's capacity to provide security during the referendum campaigns.

We have made a \$7-million contribution to the United Nations Development Programme's "referendum basket fund" that will support the activities necessary to hold the referenda. Canadian observers will be present during the referenda.

In addition, in August, we welcomed a joint delegation from the North and South to Canada for a referendum study tour, where our guests learned about our referendum experiences.

Our team of foreign-policy and aid personnel in Ottawa and in Northern and Southern Sudan have worked on a variety of fronts—diplomatic, development and programming—with the two parties to the CPA, and with members of the international community who have influence in each region, to promote long-term peace and stability throughout Sudan, regardless of the outcome of the referenda.

While the implementation of the CPA is a central concern, we cannot, do not and will not neglect the armed

conflict in Sudan's western region of Darfur, a conflict that has claimed over 300,000 lives and displaced over 2 million people.

Canada has funded the training of, and provided state-of-the-art armoured personnel carriers to, African police units serving in the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Mission in Darfur. When I travelled to Sudan in 2008, I made it clear that improving Canada's relations with the Government of Sudan depends on the government's willingness to end violence in Darfur, implement the CPA and improve the overall human rights situation in Sudan.

With contributions of over \$800 million since 2006, the Canadian International Development Agency, the Department of National Defence, and Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada, with strong support from the RCMP and Public Safety Canada, have jointly pursued long-term peace and stability in Sudan and the region.

The importance of Sudanese Canadians to both Canada and Sudan cannot be overlooked, nor can their role in the peace process. Their large community, concentrated mainly in Calgary and Toronto, has made significant contributions to Canada as its members discover a better life here.

It is our hope that we can help the citizens of their country achieve a peaceful and prosperous future.

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