Swiss peacebuilding efforts in Sudan

Switzerland's diplomatic engagement in Sudan dates back to the mid-1990s. The country's involvement consists of support for various initiatives including the House of Nationalities, a safe venue where all ethnic groups of South Sudan are encouraged to meet and discuss political and cultural problems; the Nuba Mountains ceasefire agreement signed at Bürgenstock, Switzerland; the North-South peace talks in Naivasha, Kenya; and the Abuja peace talks in Nigeria. Switzerland has also supported various activities in the field of humanitarian aid, recovery and development cooperation.

1.1   North-South conflict mediation

In 1994, a delegation of Swiss experts and diplomats was mandated by the Sudanese government to mediate a settlement between the conflicting parties in the North and the South. Throughout the years, Switzerland has gained the essential trust to successfully act as a mediator between the Sudanese government in Khartoum and the insurgents of the Southern regions of Sudan. As well as offering a negotiating venue, Switzerland actively engaged in the peace process by proposing negotiating methods and solutions. In January 2002, after eight years of peace talks, the Swiss delegation brokered the Nuba Mountains ceasefire agreement at Bürgenstock in central Switzerland. The initiative signed at Bürgenstock represents a cornerstone within the peace efforts of the international community for Southern Sudan. It not only laid the foundation for the following peace talks, it also provided the framework for the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) that was signed by the Sudanese government and the insurgents on 9 January 2005. The Agreement officially ended the conflict, providing the mainly Christian and animist Southern Sudan with a six-year interim period of autonomy, to be followed by a referendum on the political self-determination of the region.

Despite the relative success of the international peace negotiation efforts in Southern Sudan, civil war has shifted to the country's western provinces, namely Darfur.

1.2   Swiss peace policy in Darfur

Since the outbreak of fighting in 2003, Switzerland's efforts have mainly been concentrated on humanitarian assistance. The Swiss Agency for Development (SDC) as well as Swiss NGOs have been operating in Darfur to assist the conflict-affected population. According to the SDC, special efforts are now needed to help more than 2 million internally displaced people as well as over 200,000 Darfurian refugees currently in eastern Chad.

The humanitarian situation has continued to degenerate due to grave violations of the Darfur Peace Agreement (DPA) that was originally signed by the Sudanese government and the Sudanese Liberation Army (SLA) in 2006. The aim of the DPA was to achieve a political settlement of the conflict and to bring an end to the Darfurian crisis. However, recent developments have proven differently. It is becoming apparent that sustainable peace will remain elusive as long as the international community fails to protect Darfur's civilians and a workable peace agreement acceptable to all parties is not established.

Unlike its mediation efforts for the settlement of the North-South conflict, Switzerland is not directly involved in the peace process in Darfur and is only participating within the framework of the UN-led initiative.

In their roadmap toward peace presented to the UN Security Council on 8 June 2007, the UN Special Envoys to Darfur suggested three stages: the first is to unite all ongoing peace initiatives; the second entails shuttle diplomacy to Khartoum and to the non-signatories of the 2006 DPA; and the third phase is peace negotiations. Within this framework, Switzerland has agitated for peace efforts in various UN institutions and has also allocated peacebuilding advisors for the UN envoys in Darfur. The country also sent a mediation expert to peace negotiations in Libya in October 2007. Yet, no significant progress toward peace was achieved due to a boycott of the talks by the two major rebel groups, the Sudan Liberation Army (SLA) and the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM).

Besides political and diplomatic efforts, successful peacekeeping operations are crucial for the settlement of the Darfur conflict. After the failure of the African Union Mission in Sudan (AMIS) and long-winded diplomatic struggles within the UN Security Council, the Council approved Resolution 1769 on 31 July 2007, authorizing the deployment of a joint UN - African Union peacekeeping mission, the UN-AU Mission in Darfur (UNAMID). UNAMID took over operations from AMIS by 31 December 2007. Switzerland is deliberating whether it will send troops to participate.

Yet, diplomatic peacebuilding efforts remain the core focus of Swiss peace policy in Darfur. The conflict clearly demonstrates that peacebuilding and conflict resolution are not a quick fix. There are no ready-made solutions and the complexity attached to it requires a concerted effort aimed not only at the short-term issues, but more importantly at the deeper problems and causes of the conflict. It has been, and still is, the goal of Swiss peacebuilding efforts to support the process of conflict transformation in the political, diplomatic and civilian spheres to find permanent solutions.

1.3   Focus on peacebuilding

Switzerland has a long tradition in offering assistance with peacebuilding and conflict resolution. As well as supporting fragile peace processes through technical expertise, practical know-how and financial contributions, Switzerland has also been keen to play an active role in diplomatic peace processes.

As the Foreign Policy Report 2000 points out, the peaceful coexistence of nations is one of the primary objectives of Swiss foreign policy. Currently, there are more than 570 Swiss experts deployed for various bilateral and multilateral peace building projects around the world, concentrating on aspects such as election monitoring, reform of the security sector, protection of human rights and international humanitarian law, reconciliation processes.

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1.4 INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

United Nations - African Union Mission in Darfur (UNAMID)
The website of UNAMID provides background information, latest news and press statements by special representatives on the joint United Nations - African Union operation in Darfur.

African Union Mission in the Sudan (AMIS)
The AMIS website presents background information on the African Union operation in Sudan. Special focus is given to the Darfurian peace process.

United Nations Mission in Sudan (UNMIS)
The website of UNMIS offers information on the United Nations operation in Sudan. Special focus is given to the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA).

United Nations Sudan Information Gateway
This site provides regular reports and statistical data on the situation in Sudan as well as information on the UN's programs in Sudan.

Chad/Darfur Emergency, by the UN High Commissioner's Office for Refugees (UNHCR)
This website provides general information, news, reports, maps and photos on the Chad and Darfur crisis region as well as details on UNHCR activities in Chad and Sudan.

The United Nations and Darfur, Fact Sheet, by the United Nations (PDF)
This UN fact sheet provides background information on the situation in Darfur.

The House of Nationalities
This website outlines the concept of the House of Nationalities and provides detailed information on its aims and principles. Besides, it offers studies and publications, background papers, conference resolutions and communiqués on the situation in the South of Sudan.

Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), by the United Nations Mission in Sudan (UNMIS)
This website contains the text of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) as well as background information on the CPA.

Darfur Peace Agreement (DPA), by the United Nations Mission in Sudan (UNMIS)
This website contains the text of the Darfur Peace Agreement (DPA), which was signed by the Government of Sudan and the Sudan Liberation Movement on 5 May 2006.

1.5 GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS

Peace, by the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA)
This website offers information on Swiss peace and security policy. It provides an overview of Switzerland's assistance in conflict resolution, its involvement in international peacekeeping operations and its engagement in arms control and disarmament.

1.6 RESEARCH AND ACADEMIA

Lehren aus den Schweizer Mediations- und Fazilitationsdiensten im Sudan, by the Center for Security Studies (CSS), Zurich, Switzerland
This publication by Simon A Mason provides an introduction to mediation and facilitation methodology and analyzes Switzerland's engagement in Sudan.