

ADDRESS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF JUBA
by
Chairperson of the AU High Level Implementation Panel

7 JANUARY 2011,

Mr. Thabo Mbeki

Director of Ceremonies,
President Abdusalami Abubakar,
President Pierre Buyoya,
Honourable Ministers of the Government of South Sudan,
Vice Chancellor, students and staff of the University of Juba,
Members of Southern Sudan civil society,
Your Excellencies Ambassadors and members of the diplomatic corps,
Distinguished guests,
Ladies and gentlemen:

On behalf of the African Union High Level Implementation Panel for Sudan I would like to thank the University of Juba and the Southern Sudan civil society coalition for giving us the opportunity to address this important gathering today.

With your permission, I would like to begin this Address by repeating what I said two days ago when I spoke at the University of Khartoum.

When the Panel was constituted in October 2009, at the conclusion of our work as the AU Panel on Darfur, the Peace and Security Council said our mandate was to work with the Government and people of Sudan (i) to pursue policies it had adopted focused on the resolution of the conflict in Darfur, (ii) to assist in the implementation of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, and (iii) to support the process of the democratisation of Sudan.

As you can see, this mandate covers virtually all the important challenges currently facing Sudan. For this reason, to honour our present and earlier mandates, we have spent the greater part of the past 21 months here in Sudan, having had virtually to defer all our other engagements in our own countries.

You may ask why I have told you all this.

I thought this might be important in order to communicate what I believe is an important message. That message is that your Continent, Africa, and its premier organisation, the African Union, are deeply concerned to do everything possible to assist the sister people of Sudan to address the challenges I have mentioned.

As a token of its seriousness in this regard, the AU did what it had never done before and appointed three former Heads of State to act as its Task Force to help resolve what the Union views as matters that are of critical importance to the future of our Continent.

We speak to you today on the eve of the historic referendum of Southern Sudan which will determine the future of this part of Sudan and Sudan as a whole. Equally, it is a fulfilment of the momentous Comprehensive Peace Agreement. It is a day for which generations strived and longed for, as well as the commencement of a process of the reconstruction of Sudan, both North and South.

We speak to you as fellow Africans, who have had the privilege of witnessing many African countries exercise their right of self-determination and engage in complex and sustained processes of peace and nation building, democratisation, reconstruction and development.

There is no gainsaying the fact that the Comprehensive Peace Agreement which finally ended a twenty-one year long civil war will reach one of its critical moments in two days' time.

When the late Dr. John Garang de Mabior, Chairman of the SPLM, and Vice President Ali Osman Taha signed that historic accord, sceptical voices were raised. Some amongst these argued that the agreement was no more than a truce and that the war was certain to resume. Still others claimed that northern Sudan would never allow it to be implemented, or that the southern Sudanese would never be able to establish their own government.

The referendum which is about to commence represents the faithful implementation of the central provisions of the CPA, itself a reflection of the maturity of the leadership and people of Sudan as a whole.

In this context, we would like to congratulate President Omar Hassan al Bashir, First Vice President Salva Kiir Mayardit and Vice President Ali Osman Taha for successfully leading their parties and the people of Sudan to this historic moment. Similarly we cannot but once more pay posthumous tribute to the late Dr John Garang.

Even as we pay tribute to these important leaders, we should not forget to salute those who preceded them. We recall here great African patriots such as Mayen Mathiang, the Prophet Ngundeng, King Akwei of the Anuak, and King Gbudwe Basingbe of the Zande, who bravely resisted the invader. We also recall the liberators of the generation of the 1920s such as Ariendit of the Malwal Dinka, Kon Anok of the Aliab, and Gwek Ngundeng.

As the coloniser pursued control over southern Sudan, the White Flag League, drawing from the rich traditions of the patriots to which we have just referred, was founded to liberate Sudan as a whole.

Thus did Ali Abdel Latif, a southern Sudanese, in 1922, issue a clarion call for the right of self-determination for all the peoples of the Nile Valley. Two years later he served as one of the founders of the first secular nationalist movement in Sudan.

Like his fellow Africans further south in South Africa, the founders of the African National Congress who, at its formation in 1912 had committed themselves to "burying the demon of tribalism", Ali Abdel Latif correctly recognised that the success of the struggle for liberation lay in the unity of all Africans regardless of their ethnic backgrounds.

We must similarly acknowledge the historic contributions of such leaders as General Joseph Lagu and the Honourable Abel Alier.

Indeed, as a consequence of the colonial policy against which Ali Abdel Latif and his comrades fought, southern Sudan was, fifty years ago, one of the least developed regions of the country and Continent. It had low infrastructure development, the lowest levels of education, and most rudimentary forms of administration.

When, in January 1953, the Sudanese and Egyptian political leaders agreed with the British on the Sudan's right of self-determination, no single southern Sudanese leader participated. When Sudan made the transition from colonial administration to self-government, just a handful of the 800 administrative positions available were awarded to southerners.

When Sudan achieved its independence on 1 January 1956, the southern Sudanese members of the national assembly were unable to enforce the government's commitment to a federal system that took southern concerns into account. This continued the colonial legacy of underdevelopment not only in south Sudan but also in the rest of the country, save for Khartoum and other northern areas.

The exercise of the right to self-determination by the Southern Sudanese in two days' time will therefore be a fitting culmination to a long period of struggle. It must therefore also be a moment when we salute the heroes and heroines of the SPLM/SPLA and their predecessors who laid down their lives and otherwise made many sacrifices to ensure that the people of Southern Sudan have the possibility freely to determine their destiny.

We are certain that the example set by these patriots will continue to inspire present and future generations of Southern Sudanese to respond to the new challenges they must and will confront.

The legacy of underdevelopment we have mentioned is yet to be overcome. The challenge facing southern Sudan in the years ahead is to fight a new war. This is a war against poverty to build a better life for all the people of southern Sudan. As the experience of all our countries on the Continent confirms, this will be a long and protracted war which will have to be anchored on a sound South Sudan Reconstruction and Development Programme pursued and implemented in the context of peaceful co-existence with her neighbours, starting with northern Sudan.

It will of necessity also have to be anchored on a democratic, developmental state capable of articulating and mobilising the necessary capacity from amongst the people to implement its programme with the people as the central pillars of that programme.

Necessarily, this means that the new southern Sudan state will have to articulate and develop relations with the rest of the region, the Continent and the world while paying attention to the creation of its own internal capacity to respond to its own developmental challenges.

This, of course, should be part and parcel of, and contribute to the realisation of an important objective of the exercise of the right to self-determination, the right to respect and human dignity.

In all the African liberation struggles, our movements were also determined to create the conditions for self-fulfilment, including celebration of our languages and cultures and the affirmation of our identities. We are certain that here too the exercise of the right to self-determination will give the people of Southern Sudan the possibility to achieve these objectives.

As all of us know so well, the defeat of colonialism on our Continent created the possibility for the peoples of Africa to take the initiative to rebuild their unity, as was expressed by the formation of the OAU forty eight years ago. Recognising the fact that that unity required the total liberation of Africa, independent Africa acted in unity to ensure the total eradication of colonialism and apartheid.

We make these comments to underline the point that the African struggle for liberation has always also had the objective to achieve African integration and unity, informed by the imperative to give expression to African solidarity. Again we are certain that as the people of Southern Sudan exercise their right to self-determination, so will they continue to address the important issue of how they should contribute to the larger Pan-African project.

Happily the people of Southern Sudan have direct experience of the real meaning and importance of African solidarity.

With respect to Sudan, that African solidarity was expressed through practical politics. Neighbouring countries hosted hundreds of thousands of refugees from Sudan's wars. Communities and governments provided land, shared basic

resources and services, and directed international aid towards refugees. The cost of this assistance to African countries has gone largely unmeasured, but its significance is as great as, or greater than, the aid channelled through international organizations.

Equally notably, it was IGAD that conceived and nurtured the agenda of self-determination as a right for the people of southern Sudan and as the central component in a resolution of the Sudanese crisis. The 1994 IGAD Declaration of Principles served as the foundation document for the Machakos Protocol of 2002 and ultimately the CPA itself.

At the darkest hour of the war in southern Sudan, when the end of the struggle seemed at its most remote, when the people were most divided and demoralised, it was Sudan's African neighbours, acting in a spirit of collective solidarity, which identified the foundation stone of a future settlement. And for eight long years these countries did not waver in their commitment to the Sudanese people.

However and at the same time, the southern Sudanese people, whatever is their choice in the referendum about to be held, will emerge as true contributors to the emancipation and transformation of our continent. The self-determination of the southern Sudanese people is therefore a cause for celebration across Africa, an opportunity for Africa's advancement and a spur further to entrench the African solidarity which has stood all the Sudanese people both North and South in good stead.

Southern Sudan is about to exercise its right to self-determination in the 21st century, in the context of a transformed global environment and with the possibility to learn from the accumulated experience of African independence. We would therefore like to believe that should you, the people of southern Sudan, choose independence, you would indeed draw on this experience to ensure the successful construction of what will be Africa's 54th state.

Part of that experience tells us that the struggle for self-determination is also a struggle for democracy and equality. The exercise of national self-determination, marked by the birth of an independent state is a vital step, but it is not the only step. It is when all citizens in a state, regardless of colour, race, ethnic origin, religious belief or gender exercise equal rights, that it can be said that freedom has truly been achieved.

When the SPLM was fighting its long war, it espoused the twin principles of self-determination for southern Sudan, and building a New Sudan based on the equality of all citizens. The two principles are not incompatible. Indeed they complement each other. Should the vote on self-determination be in favour of secession, this will surely reflect the sentiments of the southern Sudanese that they did not enjoy equal status within a united Sudan.

As the South Sudan Interim Constitution indicates so unequivocally, the solution to any such discrimination is not to establish a new state that upholds a different and reverse hierarchy of discrimination. Rather it is to establish a state in which no such discrimination is allowed to exist.

Within Southern Sudan, the days and months following the historic exercise of the right of self-determination will be a time for healing, for reconciliation and for building a new, inclusive and democratic Southern Sudan.

In this context we would like to commend the Chairperson of the SPLM and President of the Government of Southern Sudan, H.E. Salva Kiir Mayardit, for the initiative he took towards the end of last year to convene a meeting of the South Sudanese political parties during which they agreed to work together to rebuild Southern Sudan inspired by a common patriotism and commitment to serve the people of Southern Sudan.

Similarly, we reiterate our warm welcome of the amnesty which the President announced to end all conflicts within Southern Sudan, precisely to address the critically important challenge of peace, unity and reconciliation.

It is understandable that Sudanese of northern origin who live here in southern Sudan should feel anxious at this time.

We are greatly encouraged by the reassurances given by the leadership of southern Sudan, that the rights of all northern Sudanese would be respected and protected within the context of the country's nationality and citizenship laws. We are confident that all southern Sudanese will take this exhortation to heart, and make a special effort to allay the fears of any northerners living among them.

Equally, we are confident that, in the case of the secession of the south, northern Sudan will also embrace its diverse identity as an African nation. Those Southern Sudanese resident in northern Sudan should equally be respected and protected, again within the context of the legal framework the North will establish for itself.

Africa's experience also communicates the message that successful nation building requires an equitable sharing of the country's national resources to ensure balanced development of all communities and regions. The people of Southern Sudan have direct experience of what this has meant to them.

Starting during the colonial period, and continued during the years of independence, this part of Sudan, like other regions of the country, was negatively affected by the concentration of resources in one part of the country and the marginalisation of the rest. We are certain that this will put an independent South Sudan in good stead as it implements its own development programme, which will surely ensure that the gross mistake of the underdevelopment of the periphery is not repeated.

That long period of marginalisation has imposed on this part of Sudan a very heavy burden of underdevelopment which will take a considerable period of time and resources to eradicate. We trust that the broad leadership of the people of Southern Sudan, and not only those in government, will make the necessary effort to communicate the message to the people as a whole that it will indeed take time to address their development needs and aspirations and thus help to manage their legitimate expectations.

Africa's experience also informs us that to achieve the development it needs, Southern Sudan will also have to build a strong developmental state which would lead the process of the reconstruction and development of the new country. We are certain that the leadership of Southern Sudan is doing all the necessary work to ensure that this objective is achieved, to ensure that it accelerates the process of bringing about the socio-economic changes which the people will expect as the independence dividend.

In the negotiations on the Post-Referendum Arrangements, the leaders of the SPLM and the NCP have reached the important agreement that in the event of secession, they will work together to build "two viable states."

This commitment to "two viable states" has political, security, economic and social dimensions. It is deeper than a promise to respect one another's sovereignty. It requires ongoing cooperation in all those fields, and building a special relationship of good neighbourliness, friendship and solidarity across what will be the longest international border on this continent. This border should be a "soft border", allowing the people who live adjacent to the border, or whose livelihoods depend upon crossing the border, to continue their lives with minimal disruption.

We are certain that as they develop their relationship as two viable states, Southern and Northern Sudan will also pay particular attention to what Africa is working to achieve, taking into account at least half-a-century of independence.

We refer here to the task which Africa has set itself to move forward as rapidly as possible towards its political and economic integration and unity, both to reverse the colonial legacy of fragmentation and to use the combined capacities of our states to bring more meaningful benefits to the peoples of Africa as a whole, especially within the context of the process of globalisation.

In the 21st century it is as clear as ever that if Africa is to rise and meet the aspirations of its people, it must unite, but that such unity must take the form of a true economic and social integration, upon which base we can build political unity. If Southern Sudan secedes, this might indeed create the possibility for the two states to lead Africa by showing our Continent the way forward about what might be done to achieve the integration which our Continent has set as one of its urgent and principal goals.

Further, we should not forget that one of the distinguishing features of Sudanese national identity has been its openness to immigration, its readiness to welcome people from all corners of the African continent. Sudan has truly been a melting pot of diverse identities. In this context, the commitment to two viable states must be seen as a commitment to two viable Sudanese states, each of them distinguished by this commitment to pluralism and diversity, and to openness to the entire African continent, including of course to each other.

We are greatly encouraged that the leadership of both Southern and Northern Sudan is determined to maintain a special relationship between the two parts of the country, seeing the possibility of a vote for secession as a chance to re-set this relationship on the basis of equality. The aftermath of the referendum will be an opportunity for the Northern and Southern Sudanese to know one another better, to reconcile, to overcome the difficult legacies of the past, and to forge closer and more durable relationships.

In this context we should also remind ourselves that Sudan has always been a multi-ethnic African state. Should it divide into two countries, it will divide into two diverse, multi-ethnic African states. Some writers on Sudan have spoken of an “African” south and an “Arab” north. However we are firmly of the view that both Southern and Northern Sudan are equally African.

Some of the citizens of Sudan speak Arabic as their native language and can trace their genealogies to Arab countries, but this does not make them any less African than any other Sudanese. They are African Arabs. Indeed, from its earliest days the SPLM acknowledged, with regard to Arab identity and language, that “this aspect of our reality is immutable.”

In the event of a vote for secession, it is as these African countries that the two states will have to build a relationship of friendship and mutually beneficial cooperation not only between themselves, but also with the rest of Africa, starting with their neighbours.

With regard to Southern Sudan we are certain that you do not need anybody to remind you that it is located adjacent to vast areas of the African continent that have suffered and suffer from conflict, including the Horn of Africa, the Great Lakes region and Central Africa. We are certain that an independent Southern Africa will act as a positive force in this neighbourhood, contributing to the attainment of the important regional and African objectives of peace, stability and development.

It is also a matter of common cause that because of its location, today’s Sudan has the possibility to make a powerful contribution to the development of a large part of our Continent and therefore Africa as a whole because it shares borders with nine other countries. In the event of secession, the two states will continue to bear a continuing obligation to their neighbourhood and thus position themselves as major players in Africa’s quest for its renewal.

The historic referendum that will start on 9 January, in which you all have a chance to vote, marks the true emancipation of the people of southern Sudan. Whether the people vote for unity or for secession, the act of choosing is itself an act of great importance. What will be decided thereafter will be decided through the free will of the people.

However the work of freedom is just at its beginning. We are confident that the Southern Sudanese people have the strength and spirit to succeed in that endeavour. We are equally confident that the leaders of Southern Sudan have the

determination and capacity to take their people forward, as valued partners among the peoples of Africa, in the 21st century.

We are very happy that the University of Juba and the Southern Sudan civil society coalition have given us this opportunity to speak to you, including the young people of Southern Sudan, at this critical point in the history of the Sudanese nation.

Once again, with your permission, we would like to repeat what we said two days ago when we spoke at the University of Khartoum.

As Africans we know that the future of Sudan, both south and north, is our future. As Sudanese, both southerners and northerners, you must know that Africa stands and will stand with you regardless of the political season, and that our solidarity and friendship are unconditional.

As Africans we know that whatever the challenges of the moment, Sudan will achieve peace with itself and friendship among all its people, which peace and friendship will draw the Sudanese people, their neighbours and all Africa, ever closer together.

We, who represent an older generation, which has made its own mistakes and its own contribution to a better Africa, count on you, the youth of Africa, to discover and carry out your own mission, which would surely contain the objective to achieve the renaissance both of Sudan, whether one country or two, and your mother Continent, Africa.

Thank you.