

# SPEECH AT THE UNIVERSITY OF KHARTOUM: FRIENDSHIP HALL

05 January 2011

**Mr. Thabo Mbeki**

Director of Ceremonies,

President Pierre Buyoya,

Vice Chancellor, Students and staff of the University of Khartoum,

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 Khartoum and its Peace Centre for giving us the opportunity to address this important gathering today.

When the Panel was constituted, 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.

As students or casual observers of African politics, especially as you celebrated your 55th anniversary of independence only four days ago, you will be aware of the fact that most commentators and African

histories say that Ghana was the first sub-Sahara country to gain independence after the Second World War.

The historical reality however is that this country, Sudan, gained its independence more than a year ahead of Ghana, which became independent in 1957.

The question therefore arises – why is the mistake made so repeatedly, that Ghana became independent ahead of Sudan, with many of even your fellow Africans even being unaware of when Sudan gained its independence!

The truth is that this mistake derives from this country's unhappy history.

As all of us know, a year ahead of your independence, in 1955, a rebellion broke out in Southern Sudan. The essential reason for the rebellion was that your compatriots in the South saw the impending independence as a threat to them, which they elected to oppose by resorting to the weapons of war.

I would like to suggest that it was the 1955 rebellion, and the subsequent first civil war, which communicated the firm message to the overwhelming majority of your fellow Africans, throughout Africa, that Sudan's independence was not complete as it still had to complete the process of decolonisation.

It is from this that the view emerged that Ghana was the first sub-Sahara African country post-Second World War to achieve independence.

I am certain that you will have understood from what I have said that I believe that it was inevitable that as long as the rest of Africa entertained the belief that Sudan had not yet addressed the important issue of the peaceful coexistence of its diverse communities, so long would it sustain an ambivalent attitude towards this country's independence.

That ambivalence was further reinforced by the outbreak of the second civil war in 1983 which encompassed not only southern Sudan but also the Nuba Mountains and Blue Nile, and finally ended 21 years later when the CPA was signed. As you would expect, it was also fed by the rebellions which broke out in Eastern Sudan and Darfur.

Before I proceed any further, I would like to say something else about our Panel.

We have come among you not as foreigners, but as fellow Africans who are convinced that we share a common destiny. Accordingly, it is not possible for us to distance ourselves from the problems this sister country and people face, arguing that these are Sudanese problems. To us the problems of Sudan are our problems, its challenges and successes our challenges and successes.

Accordingly we cannot and will not stand on some high pedestal, as some from elsewhere in the world do, demanding that Sudan must do this or do the other. Rather we will say, let us, together, do this or do the other, while, at the same time, we respect the sovereign right of the people of Sudan to determine their destiny.

This also means that to solve our common problems, to respond together to our common challenges and to determine our shared destiny as one African people, we must speak to you and to one another

about those problems, challenges and destiny frankly and openly as fellow combatants for Africa's renewal who share the same trenches.

It is in this spirit that we speak to you today, to respond to one another as the fellow combatants for Africa's renewal, who share the same trenches I have mentioned.

The reality we face as we discuss Sudan's contemporary challenges is that during the British colonial period, this city, Khartoum, and its wider environs came to serve as the focal point of the concentration of political and economic power, leaving the rest of the country as a marginalised, disempowered and underdeveloped periphery.

It was inevitable that sooner or later this periphery would rebel to contest its marginalisation, as was signalled by the South Sudan rebellion which broke out in 1955.

Part of our tragedy is that throughout the years of independence, until the conclusion of the CPA in 2005, the Darfur Peace Agreement in 2006 and the Eastern Sudan Peace Agreement again in 2006, ruling groups in this country failed successfully to resolve the problem posed by the polarisation of Sudan into one centre and many peripheral regions.

Rather, to maintain its position of dominance and privilege, the centre chose to rely on the use of force and the silencing of the voice of the periphery by doing its best to stifle democratic opinion and action, seeing such democratic expression as a threat to its continued survival.

The historic peace agreements signed in 2005 and 2006 represented a decisive break with this costly past, a great leap forward away from the heritage which independent Sudan inherited from the inherently unjust and unsustainable colonial construct imposed on Sudan by the British-dominated Anglo-Egyptian Condominium.

All three of us, members of the AU Panel for Sudan, have had direct experience of radical change in our own countries.

Accordingly, all three of us, both singly and collectively, are especially sensitive to the challenges and enormous burdens those charged by historical circumstance to exercise the function of leadership have to face and carry during periods requiring radical political and social change.

We are therefore very mindful of the sacrifices the political leaders of Sudan have to make, even in terms of their personal lives, to play their roles as change agents for the creation of a new reality which portends a future of hope, happiness and a better life for all the people of Sudan.

In this regard, we would like to pay special tribute to their Excellencies, President Omar Hassan al-Bashir and Vice President Ali Osman Taha.

All of us owe the outstanding Sudanese and African success of the conclusion of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, to the courage of these eminent Sudanese and African patriots to break with a painful past, and their commitment to work for a life of peace, happiness and prosperity for all Sudanese men, women and children.

We would also like to take this opportunity to thank these respected leaders and their colleagues for the manner in which they have opened theirs and all other doors in Sudan to enable us to do what we have had to do to discharge our obligation to work with all Sudanese to help determine our shared destiny.

We will continue confidently to rely on them, as must the Sudanese people as a whole, to continue to work for the implementation of the Peace Agreement we have mentioned, since they are not only signatories to these Agreements, but also their most eminent Guarantors.

We are also confident that the search for peace in Darfur will be pursued to a successful conclusion and that the Eastern Sudan Peace Agreement will also be implemented fully, to become another African success.

Yesterday, speaking in Juba, President Bashir displayed once again his commitment to the CPA and his qualities of national leadership. There is no greater test of statesmanship than to accept, in a graceful, generous and humane manner, the decision of those of your people who have the opportunity to choose secession. President Bashir's Juba speech demonstrated that he, and the Sudanese leadership, are rising to the occasion, meeting the challenge of the exercise of self-determination by the Southern Sudanese.

Similarly we would like to pay equal tribute to the late Dr John Garang de Mabior, so cruelly taken away from all of us by a most unfortunate accident, and His Excellency the First Vice President of the Republic and President of the Government of South Sudan, Salva Kiir Mayardit.

In particular, together, these two outstanding African patriots and their colleagues overcame the constraints imposed on them and the people they led and lead by the pain and bitterness which are an unavoidable part of four decades of a deadly civil war.

Thus did they commit themselves to work to make the continued unity of the Sudanese people attractive, inspired by the noble vision to build a Sudan that would be characterised by forgiveness and reconciliation, informed by the imperative to achieve peace and friendship among all Africans, while fully respecting the right to self-determination of the people of Southern Sudan.

Again we would like to use this opportunity to thank H.E. President Salva Kiir Mayardit for everything he has done to facilitate the work of our Panel, being available at all times to receive us and listen to our views.

And again we will continue to rely on him, as must the Sudanese people as a whole, to continue to contribute to the reconstruction of Sudan, regardless of the outcome of the South Sudan Referendum, to help guarantee that all Sudanese live in conditions of peace, democracy, prosperity and mutually beneficial cooperation.

Those with little knowledge of Africa might conclude that the remarks I made earlier concerning our Continent's ambivalence about the meaning of Sudan's independence in 1956 represent the only factor that defines the attitude of the rest of Africa towards the sister people of Sudan.

What might therefore come across as a paradox to these is that, to the contrary, Sudan is for us as Africans, a valuable geographic and human segment of our Continent which inspires both pride and hope.

For a millennium Europe accustomed itself to a particularly negative and dehumanising view of all of us as Africans. For instance in his Natural History, the Roman, Pliny the Elder, wrote:

“Then come regions (in Africa) that are purely imaginary: towards the west of the Ethiopian Kingdom of Merowe are...the Agriophagi (wild-beast eaters), who live chiefly on the flesh of panthers and lions; the Pamphagi (eat-all), who devour everything; the Anthropophagi (man-eaters), whose diet is human flesh.”

In the end this presentation of the African as a wild wild-beast eater, an omnivore and a cannibal, cultivated a demeaning vision of ourselves as Africans, which created the ideology which made it possible for our neighbours north of the Mediterranean to see us as fit objects to serve them as slaves, and whose lands they could later seize and treat as their property, and us as their colonial subjects, whom the colonisers said had every reason to be happy to be colonised and therefore exposed to their civilising influence.

However, and fortunately, contrary to the view of ourselves propagated by those inspired by notions of white supremacy, we now know of Nubian Sudan and its seminal contribution to the evolution of human civilisation and can see this contribution for instance in the pyramids north of this city, which are older than the Egyptian pyramids, and the ancient artefacts and remains, including mummies, which are in the National Museum located in this city.

Five thousand years ago the capital city of Kerma was one of the wonders of the world, its artists creating monumental granite statues of the Nubian Pharaohs of the era. Even today, archaeologists are making new finds, uncovering the true extent of the ancient civilisations of Sudan, which confirm that the first cities in the world were established along the banks of the Nile in Sudan.

I would like to believe that many among us here will be familiar with the comments made by the outstanding Senegalese scholar, Cheik Anta Diop, in his famous book, “Civilisation or Barbarism”.

Among other things Diop writes of “proof (being) now established that Nubian monarchy is the oldest in the history of humanity” and that the “Nubian royalty, which appears to us with the future essential attributes of the Egyptian monarchy, had preceded it by at least three generations.”

I refer to this ancient history because of its critical importance in the struggle we have to continue to wage as Africans, to reclaim our place as equals with other human beings, and not the sub-humans others claimed we were, thus to justify our transportation out of Africa as slaves and our subjugation as colonial subjects.

As I have indicated, much of that ancient history originates from this country, and serves to confirm Africa’s critical contribution to human civilisation. This cannot but position Sudan in our consciousness as Africans as a source of pride, a place from which we should draw inspiration as we work to achieve the renaissance of our Continent.

Further to this, Sudan gives us pride because it is a crossroads of Africa. Among the Sudanese, we find individuals and whole communities that originate from different corners of Africa. Every border, whether north, south, east or west, is straddled by communities that live both in Sudan and in the neighbouring countries.

Thus do we have Nubians here and in Egypt, the Beja in Sudan, Egypt and Eritrea, the Nuer and Anuak here and in Ethiopia, the Toposa shared with Kenya, the Acholi and Madi here and in Uganda, and the Zande here and the Congo.

The Fertit people are also in the Central African Republic and the Masalit, Zaghawa, Salamat and Rizeigat also in Chad.

The Zaghawa, the Zayadiya and the Meidob are also in Libya, as the Rashaida are on both sides of the Red Sea.

Immigration from West Africa, over many generations, has also enriched Sudan. Literally millions of people of West African origin are to be found in Sudan, fully integrated and accepted as Sudanese citizens.

We also find the very African identity of Sudan in the manner in which Islam and Arabic were introduced to this country. As the eminent Sudanese historian Yusuf Fadl Hasan has shown, Islam came to Sudan peacefully, not through invasion. The rulers of Sennar and later of Darfur embraced Islam, and adopted the use of the Arabic language for jurisprudence and for religious teaching, without compulsion.

Reflecting modern scholarship on the Funj kingdom, Professor Mahmood Mamdani writes:

“This historical narrative clarifies one noteworthy fact: ‘Arab’ signified the cultural self-identity of the new middle class. To be sure, there were immigrant ‘Arabs’, many of whom intermarried and became Sudanese over generations. As a group, however, the Arabs of the Nile Valley in northern Sudan are native Arabs. Using today’s political vocabulary, they are *African Arabs*.”

The Sudanese nation is a true melting pot of African peoples. Sudan’s Pan-Africanism has been of the most practical kind, welcoming and integrating people from across the continent. It has provided the Sudanese people with an exceptionally rich cultural heritage, and an unparalleled tradition of accepting and absorbing people.

To emphasise our pride in this country as Africans, we can also speak of the historic struggles waged by many Sudanese patriots to resist the colonisation of our Continent. In this context we would speak of resistance leaders whom you know, such as Mohamed Ahmed al Mahdi, the Masalit Sultan Taj el Din Ismail, the Zande King, Gbudwe Basingbe, the Nuer Prophet, Ngundeng and his son, Wek, and Ali Abdel Latif who called for self-determination for the peoples of the Nile Valley in 1922, which was followed by the formation of the White Flag League two years later.

I have said everything I have said about the ancient history of Sudan, its character as an African crossroads and welcoming home for all Africans and its heroic engagement in the struggle against the colonisation of our Continent both to indicate our pride in this country and to emphasise its responsibilities to the rest of Africa.

In this context I said that Sudan also serves as a place of hope for the rest of our Continent, which I will explain shortly.

We have gathered here a mere four days before the people of Southern Sudan vote in the historic referendum which will determine whether this remains one country or separates into two independent states.

In this context we would like to emphasise that should Sudan divide, it will not divide into an “African” south and an “Arab” north, still less into two states divided by adherence to different faiths. In the case of secession, the multi-ethnic, multi-religious African country of Sudan will divide into two countries, north and south, both of which are equally African, and both of which will of necessity embrace diversity.

We hold firmly to the view that northern Sudan is no less “African” than southern Sudan. Islam is a religion of Africa, just as the Arabs of Sudan and the Mahgreb are people of Africa. As pan-Africans we are proud of the achievements of the Arab and Muslim civilisations on this continent, which we regard as an integral part of our heritage.

Contemporary African generations should not use religion and race to divide Africa. Rather, inspired by many examples from Africa’s past, they should work to ensure that our diversity unites our continent.

We proceed from this understanding in our consideration of the challenges which Sudan face today and how the country is responding to these challenges.

Few countries in the world have had a more troubled legacy, dating back to an exceptionally bloody and bitter experience of imperial conquest, and including extreme divergence in methods of imperial rule and levels of social and economic development. In its post-colonial history, Sudan has struggled with unusually acute versions of the same challenges as other African nations, namely how to construct a polity informed by the principle and practice of forging unity in diversity.

It is natural that as we approach the South Sudan referendum, you in this hall, the Sudanese people as a whole and the rest of our Continent are keenly interested to know the answer to the question – whither Sudan?

What we would like to say to you in this regard is that we are convinced that regardless of the outcome of the referendum, you and all of us should value it as a decisive moment which gives Sudan the historic possibility to make a new beginning, a new start towards a future of hope, peace and a better life for all the people of Sudan.

It is also a decisive moment for Sudan in the context of its role and place in Africa. As it makes its new start, Sudan has the possibility to convey important lessons to the rest of our Continent, for the benefit of the peoples of Africa, about how to establish genuine and lasting peace after a period of war and how to construct successful societies and states based on true respect for the rich diversity characteristic of many African countries and so clearly exemplified by this country.

A former leader of this country, the late President Jaafar el-Nimiery, presented this challenge to make a new beginning to his fellow Sudanese in 1975 when he said:

*“Unity based on diversity has become the essence and the raison d’être of the political and national entity of many an emerging African country today. We take pride in that the Sudan of the Revolution has become the exemplary essence of this new hope. The Sudan is the biggest country in Africa. It lies in its heart and at its crossroads. Its extensive territory borders (nine) African countries. Common frontiers mean common ethnical origins, common cultures and shared ways of life and environmental conditions. Trouble in the Sudan would, by necessity, spill over its frontiers, and vice versa. A turbulent and unstable Sudan would not therefore be a catalyst of peace and stability in Africa, and vice versa.”*

President Nimeiry was not, of course, able to fulfil this vision during his long rule which degenerated into dictatorship. His immediate successors, General Abdel Rahman Suwar al Dahab and Prime Minister Sadiq el-Mahdi, focused their energies on another proud strand of the Sudanese political tradition, namely nurturing democracy. Today, Sudan needs both the embrace of diversity and the promotion of democracy.

During the years of independence struggle, Sudan possessed one of the strongest progressive movements in Africa and the Middle East. The trade unions, the Communist Party and the University of Khartoum, were all beacons of progressive thought and action. Sudan’s Islamist movement, though inspired by thinkers in Egypt, Pakistan and elsewhere, was and remains an authentically Sudanese, and hence African, movement.

We are arguing that the peace and transformation processes represented by the CPA, the Eastern Sudan Peace Agreement and the Peace Agreement for Darfur currently under discussion present Sudan with the opportunity of which Jaafar el-Nimeiry spoke 35 years ago, to position itself as *“the exemplary essence of the new hope in Africa”* which would be expressed by the success of Sudan, whether as one or two countries, to achieve social and national cohesion through meaningful respect for the diversity of the population.

Relying on our experience in this country during the last 21 months, we would make bold to say that the overwhelming majority of the broad Sudanese leadership and the people as a whole are determined to respond to the challenge of making the new beginning, the new start of which I have spoken.

In this context, let me deal with a few of the tasks which have to be carried out as part of that new beginning.

As you know, some in the rest of the world have persisted in communicating the false and negative messages that the Government of Sudan would do everything possible to ensure that the South Sudan referendum does not take place and that if it does, resulting in the secession of Southern Sudan, this would lead to the resumption of the war between the North and the South.

The truth these naysayers, driven by a superior sense of themselves, do not want to accept is that the Sudanese leaders are perfectly rational human beings, who are deeply committed to peace and well being for all the people of Sudan. The Sudanese leaders committed themselves to the CPA because it was the right thing to do for the Sudanese people, not because they were so dictated or pressured by the international community.

The referendum will take place, to fulfil the commitment made in the CPA. If the people of South Sudan vote for separation there will be no war, since the peace brought about by the CPA will be sustained.

And yet, the more the people of Sudan have communicated these messages in unequivocal terms, those who do not wish Sudan well, have grown ever more strident in their propagation of their scenarios of gloom and doom.

We are very happy that their ill-advised expectations will be disappointed as the leaders and people of Sudan honour their solemn undertakings and do what is right for them and the rest of Africa.

We are equally very happy to inform this important gathering that both the Government of Sudan and the SPLM have made the solemn and vitally important commitment that should the people of South Sudan vote for secession, they will work to ensure the emergence and peaceful coexistence of two viable states, informed by the objectives of renewed friendship and cooperation between the people of North and South Sudan.

Among other things, the concept of the construction of two viable states means that the two governments will work together to ensure that each of the states they lead will achieve such viability in all areas of human activity, including the economy, security and stability, national unity and territorial integrity.

It also means that the two governments will take all necessary measures to ensure that southerners resident in the North and northerners in the South are not adversely affected by the separation in terms of their socio-economic rights. Among other things this means that nobody will be rendered stateless.

Similarly, it means that the two states will maintain a 'soft border', to allow the people in both states to continue to interact with one another with no negative impact in terms of their economic and social relations and in terms of respect for the rights of the nomadic pastoralists.

At the same time, other outstanding commitments will be met, including the conduct of the Popular Consultations in Blue Nile and South Kordofan, the resolution of the issue of Abyei and the demarcation of the North-South border.

What all this means is that if Sudan becomes two states six months hence, on July 9th, the necessary decisions will have been taken which will make it possible for Sudan to make the new start I have mentioned, which will be a new beginning informed by a shared determination to ensure that all the citizens of present day Sudan live a better life of equality, a shared peace, a shared friendship and a shared prosperity.

Even if the people of South Sudan vote for unity, this will also mean that Sudan will again be obliged to make a new beginning, basing itself on the objectives contained in the CPA, again to ensure that the people of Sudan enjoy a better life of equality, a shared peace, a shared friendship and a shared prosperity.

It is within this context that the work will continue finally to resolve the conflict in Darfur. In this regard we would like to express our appreciation for the enormous amount of work that has been done by the AU/UN Joint Chief Mediator for Darfur and the Government of the State of Qatar to facilitate the conclusion of a comprehensive peace and political agreement for Darfur through the Doha negotiations.

This agreement will require the support of the people of Darfur as a whole. Accordingly it has been agreed that the outcome of the Doha negotiations will, as soon as possible, be submitted to an inclusive

process which will take place in Darfur, to give the people in this region the opportunity to help to determine their future within the Republic of Sudan.

We are happy that the Government of Sudan has agreed to all this, which would give effect to a decision taken by the African Union in October 2009, which was later endorsed by the United Nations.

Consistent with the new beginning we have mentioned, the agreement which will emerge through the inclusive Darfur process will address all the necessary issues, such as power and wealth sharing, compensation and development, justice and reconciliation, and the place of Darfur within the larger Sudanese polity.

Thus should this agreement lay the basis to end what in our October 2009 Report we described as the crisis of Sudan in Darfur.

We are hopeful that this outcome will be achieved well ahead of the end of the CPA interim period on July 9th, and can see no reason why this objective cannot be realised.

We must also mention that we were greatly inspired by the resolve to honour the commitments contained in the Eastern Sudan Peace Agreement as represented by the highly successful pledging conference which was held recently in Kuwait and promises to provide considerable resources to develop Eastern Sudan to end its marginalisation.

We are convinced that regardless of the outcome of the South Sudan referendum, you, the Sudanese people face an exciting period which history has given you to make something new of this ancient African country.

I am very pleased that the University of Khartoum, an eminent African centre of learning, has given us the opportunity to speak to the youth of Sudan at this critical point in the history of this country.

There are a few things we would like you to know by the time you leave this Hall at the end of this interaction.

One of these is that current developments in your country, including the South Sudan referendum, present you with the challenge and opportunity to reconstruct Sudan so that it lives up to its historic obligations contained in its ancient history, its traditional role as a welcoming home for all Africans, and its eminent contribution to the struggle to maintain Africa's independence.

That challenge of reconstruction will fall particularly on your shoulders, because as the youth you represent the future of Sudan.

Secondly, we would like you to know that the future ahead of you is one of hope rather than despair. This country, in both its northern and southern parts, contains enormous agricultural and natural resources which can and must be exploited to provide the Sudanese people the better life which is their due.

It has the possibility relatively quickly to address some of its essential social and economic infrastructure needs, sufficient to accelerate its process of development.

In the context of the development challenge, we are happy to say that Sudan disposes of considerable human capital, the trained and qualified men and women, including yourselves, both here and outside the country, who must serve as the drivers of Sudan's socio-economic development. Liberated at last from the curse of war and violent conflicts, there is absolutely no reason why Sudan, whether as one country or two, does not advance to take its place as one of the leading economic powers on our Continent.

Thirdly, Sudan, whether as one or two countries, will continue to serve as an African crossroads. Accordingly, willy-nilly, what happens in this part of Africa will continue to have an important impact on the rest of our Continent. The new beginning of which we have spoken means that this area of Africa has the continuing possibility to act as one of the principal drivers of the process of the renaissance of Africa.

You, the Sudanese people have the accumulated experience, the wealth and depth of intellectual prowess, and the invaluable African patriotism, to empower and enable you to live up to this obligation to yourselves and the rest of your fellow Africans.

As Africans we know that the future of Sudan is our future. As Sudanese, 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 and your mother Continent, Africa.

Thank you.