

Access to Resources and Opportunities in Eastern Sudan: Consolidating the Comprehensive Peace Agreement **Nairobi, Kenya, 14-17 February 2005**

This four-day meeting, organised by Concordis International, brought together 18 prominent members of Sudanese civil and political society, together with renowned international scholars. The participants represented a comprehensive range of key political and geographical constituencies, particularly for Eastern Sudan. Sudanese and international experts gave ten presentations on the factors that have contributed to the political, economic and cultural marginalisation of Eastern Sudan and suggested ways to improve access to resources and opportunities in the region in the light of the recently signed Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA). Each presentation was followed by vigorous and frank group discussion, resulting in the formulation of recommendations and practical proposals.



Participants identified that a mixture of historical, climatic and political factors has contributed to the marginalisation of Eastern Sudan, which has created an unstable security situation in the region. Eastern Sudan was viewed as an area of shrinking opportunities, shrinking services and limited natural resources, such as water, land and grazing. The participants highlighted the marginalisation of the nomadic tribes, namely the Beja and the Rashaida, and viewed the issue of land rights and the difficulties involved in providing nomadic groups with services as two major problems facing Eastern Sudan.

The change in land rights that occurred in 1970 was discussed. Participants identified that land has been redistributed to large investors who did not originally own the land, and that the tribesmen who have been forced to leave their land have no right to land compensation. The major problems did not lie with Sudanese land laws as such, however, but with the way they are applied. Participants held it important that pastoral routes be preserved and small-scale holders provided with pastoral land. As the people in Eastern Sudan depend on crops and animal husbandry, regulation, restriction and registration of the land was needed.

Participants agreed on the real need to build up infrastructure in Eastern Sudan in order to enable Eastern Sudan to capitalise on the resources that it has at its disposal. The potential for tourism along the Red Sea was highlighted. Education was seen as particularly important. The low levels of education in Eastern Sudan were seen as something in serious need of addressing and that more girls be incorporated into education was seen as being especially important. Participants felt that a special commission for education could be set up in the east, which could revise the current curriculum and advocate the importance of vocational training. Participants noted that the east does have natural resources, including iron and gas, but currently lacks a transparent public policy on accountability regarding the exploitation of these resources.

Regarding the issue of reintegration, participants felt that it was important that there be provision of opportunities for former combatants to gain employment. They noted that reintegration projects need to be sensitive both to local communities and to former combatants.

The CPA was seen to concern the whole of Sudan. Although addressing a number of important problems facing Eastern Sudan, the participants felt that the CPA did not adequately address the issues of economic development or the balance between federalism and central planning. The participants also discussed the value of tribal systems and the importance of Sudan building strong relationships with its neighbours. They argued that that tribal systems are not outdated, despite the common misconception that they are backward and obsolete, and still saw traditional leaders as having a role to play, especially in conflict resolution and land redistribution. In terms of relations with neighbours, participants agreed that improved cross-border relations would benefit potential labour and goods markets.

Overall, participants felt that the CPA provides the opportunity for Sudan to move forward constructively and work towards a sustainable peace for the future. However, they stressed that issues remain regarding the accessibility of the agreement, its inclusiveness and dissemination. The participants felt that key to the success of the agreement is the Sudanese adoption of the process and active engagement. They highlighted the particular need in Eastern Sudan to increase the capacity for institution building and to raise awareness of people's rights so that they can genuinely engage in the political process.