



Canada and Sudan: A scout and an envoy

John Harker

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Owing to the controversial conduct of a new-Canadian oil company - Talisman, the former Canadian arm of British Petroleum - Canada has found itself more directly involved in the troubles of Sudan than it had been. In October 1999 Foreign Minister Axworthy appointed a scout and an envoy, the scout to look at the problems and report back, the envoy to represent Canada on the International Partners Forum (IPF) which supports the African IGAD (see below) initiative for peace in Sudan. As it happens, both were members of the Group of 78 from its start in 1981.

John Harker, the scout, conducted his assessment mission in the fall and reported at the end of January. Senator Lois Wilson, Canada's special envoy to Sudan, began her long-term work by consultations with governmental and non-governmental authorities in Canada and abroad.

Sudan, a country of 30 million people, has been riven by civil war since independence in 1956, except for a respite between 1972 and 1983. The main fault line is between the Arab and Islamic (and governing) north and the African south, divided between Christians and Animists and different tribal loyalties. Oil development has been concentrated in the south, with the oil companies looking to the government for security, and the government using the provision of such security to quell rebel forces. Talisman did not enter the scene until 1998.

John Harker, who was director of the international department of the Canadian Labour Congress for 12 years and later the representative of the International Labour Organization in Canada, has filled prominent roles in recent years as an adviser and consultant on African affairs. In conducting a "Canadian assessment mission" to the Sudan, he was concerned particularly with the extent to which oil in general - Talisman in particular - figured in the chronic communal problems of the country.

Addressing the G78 in April, he recalled that his report concluded that "oil is exacerbating conflict in Sudan" in four ways. First, oil development had brought population displacement, pacification and insecurity in the development area. Second, it had intensified fighting, not just between the Government of Sudan and "rebels" but also among the Southerners themselves, magnifying the human suffering. Third, it had provided the government with additional facilities for use by its forces, such as airstrips and roads. Fourth, it had elevated concern over control of natural resources and the use of income from them to finance the government's war effort and make it less dependent on a negotiated peace.

Mr. Harker was unimpressed by some of the views he heard from Talisman's chief executive officer, Jim Buckee. Mr. Buckee tended to blame "inter-tribal conflict" for much of the controversy that had swirled around the company. He boasted of providing the Sudanese with 53 water wells, although the company had to have them anyway for oil development. But Harker did not recommend sanctions against Talisman. The company has a 25 percent stake in the Great Nile Petroleum and Oil Corporation, which holds the concession for the two main producing areas. China's National Petroleum Corporation has a 40-percent share, Malaysia's 30 percent, and Sudan's five percent. Many other nations are participating in Sudanese oil development, and many more are competing for new concessions.

Mr. Harker said he expected, however, that the Canadian government would increasingly emphasize corporate responsibility in its treatment of companies like Talisman operating in developing countries. Answering questions, he said his assessment mission had not been focused on the peace process. "Many avenues are still worth pursuing and might just produce peace in Sudan," he said, "although it may be that, somewhere down the road, separation of north and south will be the answer."

Senator Wilson spoke on her work in Sudan to a later meeting of the Canadian Institute of International Affairs, in which she called Sudan "a case study in decolonisation and failed nation building". The various horrors wrought on the civil population by the years of strife and destruction had brought the heaviest humanitarian aid by the West in the history of the United Nations, estimated at about \$1 million a day, most of it difficult to deliver. She said Sudan's oil exports generated \$U.S. 1.2 billion a year, and were expected to contribute 22 percent of state revenues this year.

Senator Wilson is a past moderator of the United Church of Canada and a past president of the World Council of Churches. Representing Canada in the International Partners Forum (IPF), she was at a June 20 meeting in Oslo developing strategies for speeding up the often stalled peace talks of the International Authority on Development (IGAD) in Sudan, which was established by states in the area to try to work out a settlement.

Speaking earlier to the CIIA, she said, "Canada's stance is that nothing short of a comprehensive monitored peace plan is acceptable." But it was a question whether either the Sudanese government or the rebels really wanted peace.

"Even if there is a peace agreement, water and oil will continue to be contentious issues," she said. "What is at stake is the possible dismemberment of the country, causing regional instability."

Canada had supported the Sudanese Women's Conference sponsored by the Netherlands government in April, bringing women together across the dividing lines of north, south, African, Arab, Christian, Muslim, and animist to agree on a common platform of action for peace.

Senator Wilson noted that efforts by a group of non-governmental organizations to negotiate corporate responsibility guidelines with Talisman had broken down. The company had also rejected an effort by the Canadian churches Task Force on Corporate Responsibility to install a

system of monitoring and reporting on the company's adherence to internationally accepted human rights standards within a time-frame of 180 days.

The senator saw a long and arduous process of voluntary and government actions across the broad range of Sudan's problems - peace negotiations, inter-religious talks, following up the women's conference, pressing the oil companies to observe human rights standards, compensating victims of displacement, and so on - as the best approach, with no quick solution in sight.