



National Human Rights Monitors Organisation

## **The US lifts sanctions against Sudanese despite opposition from Sudanese in the Nuba Mountains October 2017**

The United States (US) permanently lifted a two-decade set of sanctions against Sudan on 12 October 2017, meaning that the US-trade embargo against Sudan and the freeze of its assets in the US is removed. It is a big achievement for Sudan as it can now re-enter the global financial system where it had been isolated for 20 years. However, Sudan stays on the US list for state sponsors of terrorism although the US said that the country had made progress in fighting terrorism.

On 8 October, in response to the lifting of sanctions, Sudan's President Bashir extended a unilateral cease-fire in the conflict regions of Darfur, Blue Nile (BN) and Southern Kordofan (SK), until 31 December.

Citizens living in areas controlled by the Sudanese Peoples Liberation Movement/Army – North (SPLM/A-N) in the Nuba Mountains were all along opposed to the lifting of US sanctions on Sudan. Testimonies collected in those areas suggest that the majority of the people wanted the sanctions to be retained. People interviewed in Nuba Mountains in August 2017 spoke of ongoing acts of war by the Sudan government, its dire human rights record and its support for terrorist groups as some of the factors for their opposition to the lifting of sanctions. They also feared that lifting the sanctions will embolden the Sudanese government in its war efforts and will enable it to acquire weapons that will be turned against them. Others mentioned corruption, the lack of development efforts and the outstanding arrest warrant by the International Criminal Court (ICC) against President Bashir.

In August 2017, human rights monitors working with the National Human Rights Monitors Organisation (NHRMO) in SK and BN conducted a quick survey of civilian perspectives regarding the possible lifting of sanctions on Sudan. Over 40 interviews were conducted in areas controlled by the SPLM/A-N with respondents who included men and women, young and old.

### **History of sanctions**

In 1993, [the US listed Sudan as a sponsor of terrorism](#) and imposed economic sanctions on the country. In 1997, the administration of then US President Bill Clinton imposed [a comprehensive trade embargo on Sudan](#) and froze Sudan government's assets in the US. In 2006, President George W. Bush issued an [Executive Order targeting those officials involved in the conflict in Sudan's Darfur region](#). These remained in place until January 2017 when, just before leaving office, [President Barack Obama partially lifted sanctions on Sudan](#) and opened a review of the entire sanction package, to be concluded in six months. However, in July 2017, at the end of this six month period, the new Trump administration, to the great disappointment of the government Sudan, extended the review process and postponed its decision on the sanctions by three more months, [until 11 October](#). In reaction, Khartoum froze negotiations with the US on sanctions until 12 October 2017. Sudan's Minister of Foreign Affairs,

Professor [Ibrahim Ghandour](#), stated that "Sudan has carried out all commitments that should have led to the total revocation of the unjust sanctions."

The US has employed sanctions for decades as a tool to help it achieve its foreign policy goals. In the case of Sudan, sanctions were initially employed to discourage Sudan from supporting or sponsoring terrorism. The first decision to impose sanctions on Sudan came at a time when terrorist groups and individuals, as identified by the US, were based in Sudan. Secondly, US sanctions were meant to pressure Sudan to halt the targeting of its own people in then southern Sudan. When, under the auspices of IGAD, Sudan agreed to a referendum on the self-determination for South Sudan in 2011, the US became inclined to review Sudan's sanctions regime. However, due to the Sudan government's continued acts of war in Darfur and the Two Areas of SK and BN, this momentum died down. Due to the prolonged maintenance of sanctions, relations between Sudan and the US progressively deteriorated until the US began to consider relaxing sanctions around 2015.

The sanctions that have been revoked were based on a five-track plan, negotiated between Sudan and the US, as a yardstick to measure progress on a selected set of issues. These included partnership in fighting terrorism, refraining from supporting the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), ceasing all Sudan government support to armed opposition groups in South Sudan, achieving cessation of hostilities in conflict areas (Darfur, SK and BN), and improving humanitarian access in disaster areas. However, notably missing from this list was improvement in human rights.

### **Ceasefire and violations**

On 17 June 2016, the Sudan government declared a unilateral ceasefire in SK, BN and Darfur. Initially, the ceasefire was declared for six months, but it was subsequently extended several times. On 2 July 2017, days before the US was expected by Khartoum to lift the 20-year old trade embargo on Sudan, the Sudanese government extended the ceasefire until 31 October. On his part, the newly appointed Chairman of SPLM/A-N, Lieutenant General Abdul Azziz Adam Hilu, announced a six month ceasefire starting from 31 July 2017 up to 31 January 2018.

Due to the ceasefire, SK and BN seemed, for the first time in five years, to be relatively calm. In contrast to the previous years, there have been no aerial bombardments of civilian areas in SK and BN since mid-2016, despite the fact that Sudanese Air Force planes have been seen in SK skies from time to time.

However, ceasefire violations, especially in terms of looting of livestock (i.e. goats, sheep and cattle) in SPLM/A-N areas of SK have been going on every month since the ceasefire started, thus undermining peoples' livelihoods during a time of drought and the ensuing food insecurity. Due to the food shortages in SPLM/A-N controlled areas such as Alazrag and Umbrabeta, many civilians have been moving to government controlled areas where they are assured of something to eat. To make it worse, the lootings are sometimes accompanied by abductions and even death.

### **Students in Nuba Mountains campaign against lifting the sanctions**

In August 2017, students in Delami County campaigned in vain against the lifting of economic sanctions on Sudan by the US. Their opposition to the lifting of sanctions was based on the absence of political stability; the dire human rights situation; the risk of having the government of Sudan empowered to continue fighting as a result of removal of sanctions and the oppression of its own people, particularly in SK, BN and Darfur. "We are against lifting the Sudan economic sanctions by the United States," said one of their posters. According to their view, if sanctions were lifted, resources would be released to the Sudan regime enabling them to continue perpetrating war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide. They also feared that the lifting of sanctions would enable the Sudan government to continue supporting international terrorism.

Most of the students preferred sanctions to be lifted when war had completely ceased in Sudan and when there was good governance, democracy and respect for human rights. They also called for free, fair and transparent elections in which all citizens could participate freely and for the perpetrators of war crimes and crimes against humanity to be tried by the ICC.

*Below, students campaigning against the lifting of sanctions on Sudan in Delami County, Nuba Mountains. (August 2017) © NHRMO*



Furthermore, they called on the government of Sudan to completely stop all acts of war in Sudan and to stop supporting international terrorism. They also wanted the government of Sudan to respect religious diversity, including through creating a climate in which every person could practice their religion without fear of harassment, and to allow humanitarian access to conflict areas in order to save lives and alleviate the suffering of the people.

### **What other people said**

Most of the respondents were against the lifting of sanctions because they believed that the funds freed up from that process would be used by the government of Sudan to purchase weapons and recruit more troops and militias to attack them.

A 40 year old man opposed the lifting of sanctions and cast doubt over Sudan's intention in effecting a prolonged ceasefire. He said, "We do not trust this government for what they say. The current ceasefire they have put in place is just for their own interest. It is meant only to help them in lifting the economic sanctions after which they

*will continue their war projects. We request the US administration to carefully examine the secret political strategy of Sudan before lifting the economic sanctions."*

Another man was more concerned about Sudan's relations with neighbouring countries and this motivated his rejection of the lifting of sanctions. *"The Sudan government has already worked out a secret strategy to support the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) of Uganda to fight the governments of Uganda and South Sudan when the economic sanctions are lifted. If sanctions are lifted, the Sudan government will buy more weapons for fighting Sudanese civilians and other countries in the region,"* he said. Previously, the [Sudan government allegedly supported the LRA](#) in retaliation for Uganda's alleged support of the SPLM/A, however, then cut off its assistance under US pressure.

A 61 year old man decried the prolonged war situation as a result of which all social services had run down. *"People are lacking all human basic needs like education, hospitals, etc... Sanctions should not be lifted until there is peace and political stability in the country,"* he said.

Several respondents said that it was not the right time to lift sanctions because the country was still at war and there was no peace or political stability. A 17 year old youth said that sanctions should only be lifted when *"[t]he economic sanctions should be lifted when the Sudan government stops the war, when there is peace and political stability in the country,"* he said.

Others referred to the indictment of the Sudanese president by the ICC and said it was ridiculous to even think of removing sanctions on a country whose president is wanted by the ICC for war crimes and crimes against humanity. *"Sudan is one of the countries in Africa whose presidents are wanted by the International Criminal Court yet Omar Bashir is still in power. Why should the US lift economic sanctions...?"* A 19 year old youth vehemently put it as follows, *"Why should the United States administration lift the economic sanctions before the right measures [culminating in arresting president Omar Bashir] are taken? Lifting of the sanctions will only encourage Omar Bashir to continue committing more crimes and he will get enough money to buy more weapons and support terrorism. The Sudan government has killed many innocent civilians and forced them off their land. Al Bashir is not allowing basic freedoms for the people. I say no to the lifting of economic sanctions on Sudan by the United States."*

A 32 year old man, a teacher, was opposed to lifting of sanctions because he thought that this would boost Sudan's military operations, international terrorism and corruption. He added, *"Additionally, the ruling class in Sudan is a party that is working for the interests of a very small minority. Therefore, if Sudan's economy is boosted following the lifting of sanctions, it is largely this minority that would benefit to the detriment of the majority of the population in the country."*

A woman in Delami County said the following, *"In my view, the lifting of sanctions by the United States will encourage the Sudan government and give it power to commit all kinds of crimes. It will enable it to support international terrorism as they already have a plan for doing that. I wish the sanctions are lifted when there is general peace in Sudan and when all citizens are able to exercise their freedoms and rights without any fear."*

Another person referred to the many people who had died in the conflict over the years and to the displacements that had taken place. He said, *"[t]he ongoing war in Sudan has killed very many civilians and resulted into many orphans and widows, in addition to massive displacements. This situation will continue if sanctions are lifted, therefore I completely reject the plan of the US administration to lift them."*

Evoking feelings touching on genocide, he went on, *"They have always been planning to wipe out the Sudanese black community, which they call 'black plastic sheet' [and if sanctions are lifted, they will continue with their*

*plan]. I believe that lifting sanctions will embolden the Sudan government to continue with their atrocities against the people.”*

### **Conclusion**

It is understandable that none of the respondents supported the lifting of sanctions. After six years of bombings that has resulted in the death of over 300 civilians and injury of over 670, most, believe that the government of Sudan will strengthen and expand its army and allied militias to continue attacking and inflicting death and pain to the people. The fact that these citizens have lived and suffered in a prolonged violent conflict makes them so sensitive to anything that would intensify and prolong the violence. It is also significant that they do not trust the Sudan government, perhaps due to a history of shifting goal posts and going back on its promises from earlier agreements. For them, it is a matter of survival in a new situation where human rights and basic freedoms would be respected and where marginalisation and discrimination are out of the picture. They are less concerned with other reasons that have been advanced by the international community and civil society for the lifting of sanctions.