

Chukudum Crisis Peace Conference

20 Aug 2002

A CONFERENCE OF RECONCILIATION AND HEALING BETWEEN THE DIDINGA PEOPLE AND THE SUDAN PEOPLES LIBERATION MOVEMENT/ARMY (SPLM/A) Although the world is often focused on Sudan when leaders and officials gather to negotiate and talk peace, it is the constant work of the New Sudan Council of Churches as they build peace at the grass roots that most excites us as Presbyterians. Ever faithful to the task of building a new reality in the South they continue to work hard at these mini-conferences that address ethnic tensions which prevent broader social cohesion. This spring PDA provided an additional \$35,000 to the ongoing peace work of the council. The following is the most recent report from the Chukudum Peace and Reconciliation Conference. Let us continue to pray hopefully that all good efforts at so many levels will in fact bring real peace to this troubled nation.

1. CONFERENCE BACKGROUND, PURPOSE AND PROCEDURE:

The relationship between the Didinga community and the military authorities in the Chukudum area (Budi County, Equatoria Region) have been tense for many years. However, the situation deteriorated dramatically from 1998/9 onwards, including the tragic killings of both civilians and military personnel. Since 1999, a number of senior delegations have intervened to mitigate and resolve the situation. While these initiatives managed to address some of the issues underlying the strife, they failed to abate the tensions and bring the antagonism to an end. Many issues are attributed to the causes of the conflict; security concerns, governance systems, socio-cultural factors and economic interests. The situation has been further exacerbated by the general conditions of war and until recently, the proximity of Kapoeta town when it was under the control of the government of Sudan.

In response, a special request was made to the New Sudan Council of Churches (NSCC), in association with the Horn of Africa Centre for Democracy and Development (HACDAD), to convene and facilitate a special conference between the parties to address the underlying causes. Conference preparations were undertaken by the SPLM and NSCC and after a series of unavoidable postponements, it finally took place between the 8th and the 12th of August at Nakwatom in Kapeoeta County. Excellent conference facilities and accommodation were provided by the Sudanese NGO Wudrans, much to the expressed gratitude of the participants.

At the request of the attending delegates, the meeting was renamed the Chukudum Crisis Peace Conference (CCPC) in order to reflect more accurately what was believed to be the central nature of the deliberations, namely; the contention between the Didinga people and the SPLM/A. From the beginning, the participants emphasized resolutely that the conflict was not between the displaced and host communities in the county (though it was acknowledged that the underlying problem was both affecting, and being influenced by, numerous inter-ethnic relationships). The purpose of the conference therefore was to promote reconciliation and healing between the Didinga and the SPLM/A authorities and formulate practical recommendations to rebuild confidence and trust and ensure relationships will not be allowed to deteriorate in the future again.

Over 170 delegates attended the meeting and included representation from Didinga, Toposa, Lotoko and Dinka communities and included SPLM civil administration representatives from Budi, Kapoeata and Magwi counties. The General Secretary of the SPLM and the Regional and deputy Secretary for Equatoria represented the SPLM/A leadership and numerous SPLA officers were in attendance. Representatives from communities displaced from their home areas in the Bor area (Upper Nile), and presently residing in New Cush, Chukudum and Narus, also attended. Community leaders from Bahr el Ghazal who partook in the 1999 West Bank Nilotic Peace Conference (Wunlit), also participated as special observers. Other observers came from the Diaspora, i.e. Canada and the SPLM offices in Britain (see appendix for full list of attendees).

The conference was opened by Cdr. James Wani and spiritual encouragement was offered by Bishop Paride Taban and other church leaders. The proceedings were marked by an open and frank debate and followed a straightforward methodology. Once the purpose of the conference was clarified, delegates were invited to speak unreservedly about their grievances and without interruption. Priority was given to the Didinga and SPLM/A representatives. Misdeeds and offenses from the past were voiced in public and a broad range of issues were raised. On the second day, the SPLM Regional Secretary for Equatoria acknowledged that mistakes from the SPLM/A were at the root of the problem and one of high points of the meeting was when the SPLM General Secretary asked the Didinga people to forgive any transgressions of the movement. Following the two days of deliberations, the main issues raised were gathered under seven dominant themes and presented back to the conference for verification and further small group discussions. The results from the group work were presented back to the plenary and amended where appropriate before they were finally approved and edited as conference resolutions. The conference concluded through the symbolic signing of a joint declaration between the two main parties; seeking pardon and reconciliation and publicly pledging themselves to undertake practical measures to ensure good relationships are restored and harmony sustained.

2. THEMATIC ISSUES RAISED DURING THE CONFERENCE:

The conference heard many testimonies from the past and it became apparent that there was a major breakdown in trust between the parties. The Didinga spoke of growing tension by the presence of the military over the years, including incidents of violence, harassment and killings. The fact that previous attempts to address the crisis had failed to transform the situation had deepened the suspicion and divisions further. The SPLA also met with loss of life and they expressed deep concerns over how the security of the area had become endangered as a result of the fallout between the parties. It was also learnt how the lack of an effective mediation and judicial mechanisms caused the situation to deteriorate further, sometimes to the level of reckless revenge and retaliation. The following outlines the seven main themes discussed by the conference.

2.1 TRUTH, JUSTICE & RECONCILIATION:

The Didinga community asserted that violations had occurred with impunity over the years, causing a devastating effect on the morale and confidence of the people. The SPLA also believe that there are cases where they have been aggrieved. The central issue under discussion was on how to atone the past and effectively accomplish reconciliation: whether particular cases from the past should be given an inclusive amnesty; or whether the truth of some of the offenses be investigated and made public; or whether perpetrators are tried and

brought to justice. The debate was deeply influenced by the offer of amnesty made to Cpt. P. Lorot by the SPLM General Secretary, Cdr. J. Wani, based on the SPLM directive signed between the SPLM Chairman and C-in-C of the SPLA, Dr Garang De Mabior, and the Chairman and C-in-C of the SPDF, DR Machar Teny-Dhurgon (Addendum 1 N°8: Implementation of the Nairobi Declaration on Unity, February, 2002). It states, 'In order to enhance the process of Peace, Unity and Reconciliation of our people, amnesty is hereby declared and granted'.

2.2.COMMON STRATEGIES FOR DEALING WITH MILITIAS :

Despite the recent liberation of Kapoeta town, the conference was reminded that the threat of hostile militia activity remains in the area and could increase if opportunities present themselves to the enemy. The conference stressed the need for a common understanding and strategy between the people of Budi County and the SPLA to ensure opposing forces don't take root in the wider area. In particular, it was agreed that the case of the disaffected officer previously with the SPLA (Capt. Lorot) required careful and urgent management.

2.3 LESSONS FROM PAST PEACE INITIATIVES:

Despite a number of initiatives in the past to resolve the conflict between the Didinga people and the SPLA, results have been mixed and evidently insufficient in resolving the crisis. The meeting therefore examined the lessons from these previous peace delegations so that the present conference could learn accordingly. In particular, the impact from the resolutions prepared by the National Mobilization & Reconciliation Commission (24th of February 1999), were reviewed. The key shortcomings were attributed to the lack of a designated body to follow up the implementation of the resolutions, the lack of specific time frames for implementation, and the lack of a mechanism or third party body to monitor progress.

2.4 MILITARY DISCIPLINE AND SENSITIVITY:

The discipline and management of the army in Budi County was discussed as an aggravating factor to the conflict. The conference agreed that continued progress in regulating such issues will positively contribute to better relationships between the military and civilians in the county. Military issues previously identified included:

- § controlling the many 'body guards' in the county under one command;
- § transferring known 'troublesome' officers to other areas;
- § strict control over unauthorized trading activities;
- § deploying an acceptable ethnic balance among the officers in the area.

2.5 ADDRESSING THREATS TO THE COUNTY'S SECURITY:

There are a number of contributing factors making Budi County and its surrounding area insecure, and therefore creating obstacles to local production and development. As a matter of urgency, the conference focused on how to create a safe and stable environment for its citizens and visiting assistance organizations. Examples previously identified, and stressed by the conference, include: the number, procedures and conduct at road blocks; the continued

presence of land mines proximate to the town; the incidences of road ambushes; the frequent theft of small weapons for sale in illicit markets. The issue of inter-communal conflict between the Didinga and other ethnic groups was also raised (in anticipation of follow up peace conferences in the area).

2.6 STRENGTHENING LAW AND ORDER IN BUDI COUNTY:

The conference also recognized that the local institutions of law and order are weak and have been undermined by the crisis in Chukudum. The county is lacking an effective civil judiciary and police force and the lack of separation of functions between the military and civil judicial institutions was discussed.

2.7 ATTRACTING SOCIAL SERVICES TO BUDI COUNTY & CHALLENGING THE CIRCULATION OF INACCURATE RUMORS ABOUT THE AREA

Another negative consequence to the Chukudum crisis has been the dramatic decline in social services and development activities over the years - partially due to the forced withdrawal of development and humanitarian agencies. This situation has been a source of anger and suspicion in the community and been compounded by the manufacture of incorrect rumors in Nairobi and the Diaspora generally. The conference discussed how this situation might be reversed and the role key organizations can play.

3. CONFERENCE DECLARATION AND RESOLUTIONS:

Under the auspice of the New Sudan Council of Churches [NSCC] and HACDAD, and with the full support of the SPLM/A leadership, over 170 people assembled in Nakwatom (the place where the white elephants gather) to revisit the causes of conflict that are troubling the Didinga people and the SPLM/A for the past 16 years, and declare a new start in reviving a positive relationship between the SPLM/A and the local population in Budi County.

4. DECLARATION:

We, the undersigned people of Didinga and the representatives of the SPLM/A, commend this conference for opening up a fresh opportunity for peace and reconciliation, and beginning a new process of healing between us. Having listened to all our deliberations and perspectives, we acknowledge and regret the shameful loss of life, suffering and destruction of property that has occurred over the years and ask forgiveness for the suffering caused to our loved ones, relatives, and the community at large. We all share the blame for yielding to 'blind revenge' and thus intensifying the crisis, but we pledge today to forgive one another and open a new chapter.

We believe we have proved to one another that through honesty and genuine openness, we can unite and solve our own problems. We make a pledge therefore to implement the spirit and resolutions of this conference as a practical challenge that will reflect our collective will to build a new, independent, free, just and peaceful nation for all southern Sudanese in the five regions of the New Sudan.

In this regard, we, the leaders of the SPLM/A, are encouraged by the long-standing commitment of the Didinga people to the liberation struggle and we are grateful to them for hosting the army and numerous displaced communities, over the years. We would like to

apologize unreservedly to the Didinga people for any wrongs committed against them by the movement and we are determined to implement the resolutions of this conference and make practical measures to improve our relationships with the community.

On our side, we the people of Didinga take as a sign of assurance and leadership the acknowledgment by the SPLM/A that the root causes of the problems have been caused by the conduct of elements within the army over the years. We accept the apology offered by SPLM/A and also acknowledge any wrongdoing that might have been caused by our people against the movement during the Chukudum crisis. We resolve to improve our relationship with the movement and to work together in pursuit of our common goal.

Together, we believe that healing and trust can be restored through greater openness, dialogue and accountability in the county and the determined efforts to implement the resolutions listed below. We ask NSCC and all the witnesses and observers of this conference, to support the implementation committee and accompany us in solidarity to bring peace and stability to Budi County and the surrounding areas:

Signed:

Johnson Juma Okot
SPLM/A Deputy Regional Secretary
For Equatoria Region

Signed:

Chief Lino Atiolmoi
Didinga Community

Witnessed by:

Telar Deng
Peace & Advocacy Coordinator
New Sudan Council of Churches

RESOLUTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE CONFERENCE

The following resolutions were endorsed by the conference. While all of the conference recommendations are deemed critical in restoring confidence and trust, the delegates from Chukudum were particularly keen to see rapid progress in:

- i) the removal of mines,
- ii) the sensitive management of the Captain Lorot case,
- iii) the continued reorganization of personnel within the army (in terms of improving the ethnic mix of officers and transferring individuals associated with past controversies), and
- iv) the conditions necessary to attract back organizations to assist with needed humanitarian and development services in the area. The County Secretary is expected to call the first meeting of the implementation committee shortly after the conference and begin the process

of drawing up in more detail the mechanisms and a timetable for making the conference resolutions operational.

3.1 The conference delegates affirm that, for the sake of peace and reconciliation, and given the general amnesty granted to all through the February 2002 agreement between the SPLM/A and the SPDF (Addendum 1), that past crimes and human rights abuses committed by either the SPLA, militia groups, gangsters, organized groups or individuals in Budi County be pardoned.

3.2 The conference recommends that the initiative already started to encourage Capt. Peter Lorot and his cohorts to reconcile and return to their community be continued, in the understanding that a general amnesty has been declared and their security has been pledged. The conference further recommends that membership of the committee to follow up this task be sensitively chosen around the existing delegation already undertaking the task.

3.3 The conference reaffirms the common interest of all parties in Budi County to work towards the elimination of hostile elements and organized militias from the area through the following measures:

§ by forming a committee to negotiate with the heads of the militia to abandon their stand and to reassure them of their security;

§ by devising appropriate policies to integrate militias into the SPLA since the general amnesty applies to them and their communities;

§ by improving communication, building confidence and raising awareness among hostile groups in Budi County so that they will refrain from military activity in the future;

§ by calling upon every chief to ensure that militia activities are rooted out of their areas of jurisdiction;

§ by ensuring that militias relinquishing their activities are provided with a copy of the amnesty and supported through the provision of food items, blankets, cooking pots and other appropriate services to assist their transition and reintegration into the community and/or the movement;

§ by the provision of transport and logistical support to the local monitoring committees responsible for the transition process by organizations such as the DOT, NSCC and other NGOs.

These tasks will be overseen by a transition and monitoring committee, made up of the following members:

§ Commissioners from Budi and Kapoeta Counties.

§ Elders & Chiefs

§ Army representative

§ Police force

§ Political representative

§ SRRA representative

§ IDP representative

3.4 Following a review of the resolutions of the National Mobilization & Reconciliation Commission, (24th of February 1999), the conference recommends that the provisions not yet fully implemented be immediately acted upon as a public sign of confidence building between the SPLM/A and the Budi County community. According to their original numbers, the outstanding recommendations for full implementation are indicated below:

N° 3 "... that those [bodyguards] who have been in Chukudum for over two years should be transferred."

N° 5 that "Sector One command must provide food and ammunition [for mobilized recruits] to avoid frustration and desertion of mobilized forces."

N° 6 that the practice of trading has "greatly affected the efficiency of the army" ... and should be replaced through "the establishment of army cooperatives and other income generating activities ...".

N° 7 that following the reorganization of road blocks, that "Sector One Command to immediately arm the present police-force that has been trained by the county authorities."

N° 8 that property looted from individuals and local/international NGOs be recovered through the "formation of a committee to control and recover ..." items.

N° 11 that the "Didinga community [works] closely with the army to track down common criminals known as mujirimoi."

3.5 The conference recommends that all Didinga soldiers loitering in the villages be brought together and deployed in various areas.

3.6 The conference calls on the SPLM/A to ensure that there is greater ethnic diversity among the officers and commanders in the area.

3.7 The conference recognizes the need for roadblocks in the county for the purposes of security and revenue collection, but recommends that;

a) they are restricted to the following locations:

§ New Cush (border Kapoeta / Budi county)

§ Kikilai (Kadepo / Chukudum)

§ Chukudum

§ Budi (Kapoeta / Torit Junction)

§ Moyo Shukun (Kanangurok / Uganda border)

b) they are managed by trained and informed personnel from the police and revenue authorities so that they are courteous to the public, and are aware of and apply the current taxation schedule for the New Sudan.

c) any revenue collected must be issued with a legitimate SPLM receipt (form 15) as local receipts are invalid.

3.8 The conference calls upon the appropriate authorities within the SPLM, with assistance from SIMAS and OSIL, to urgently clear all mines in the Chukudum area from September 2002 and be completed before the next planting season. It is recommended that this process is accompanied by mine awareness - especially for the children in the area.

3.9 The conference calls for immediate measures to be taken by the SPLM/A and the local community to remove the threat of ambushes from the area, by;

§ the SPLA, the police force and the home-guards undertaking constant patrols on the roads;

§ co-opting the local chiefs to cooperate and coordinate with the security authorities to apprehend known culprits;

§ targeting the youth within the community and setting up youth committees so that they can resolve rather than contribute to the problems of road ambushes;

§ establishing effective prison facilities in order to detain apprehended culprits;

§ making the community aware about dangers of road ambushes and requesting their assistance to cooperate in finding a solution.

3.10 The conference calls upon the SPLM/A and the local authorities to control the theft of small weapons in the area by;

§ developing harsh laws and deterrents against the theft of small weapons;

§ apprehending the criminals and issuing heavy punishment;

§ locating and destroying small weapon markets.

3.11 The conference recognizes the primary role of the civil administration and supporting traditional institutions to administer justice and maintain law, order and stability in the county, and recommends;

§ a programme to strengthen the capacity of civil and customary institutions administering justice, law and order;

§ the establishment of proper job descriptions to avoid the unnecessary overlapping of powers;

§ the establishment of a rudimentary police force;

§ the establishment of a prison forces;

§ the provision of uniforms and arms for these civil forces;

§ the building of proper prisons;

§ NSCC to assist in the establishment of paralegal training in the county;

§ that NSCC, the DOT and the SRRA assist the civil administration in acquiring radio communication

§ the full implementation of the law;

§ that the Didinga community cooperate with the law and order enforcement institutions in Budi County;

§ that the military authorities actively support and respect their obligations and the functions of the civil system.

3.12 The conference calls upon the local authorities and other specialist agencies (such as NSCC and DOT) to urgently initiate a process of conflict resolution and peace building to address inter-communal and inter-ethnic conflict in the east bank sub-Region (such as cattle raiding).

3.13 The conference strongly recommends to the SPLM, SRRA and other relevant international organizations circulate a statement explaining that a peace conference has taken place and that the crisis between the SPLM/A and the Didinga community has been peacefully resolved.

3.14 The conference requests all agencies to verify security information with the local authorities before it travels from the county to Loki, Nairobi or the Internet.

3.15 The conference calls upon all agencies associated with the area to support a request from the county officials for international organizations to make an assessment of Budi County so that they can support peace through development activities. In particular, the conference requests;

§ SRRA to improve their reporting system from the county and for SRRA Headquarters to advocate for assistance in the area without delay;

§ DOT to resume its services and continue to preach the spirit of peace;

§ CDS to spearhead local planning with the civil authorities;

§ NSCC to follow up the implementation of the recommendations.

3.16 The conference recommends the immediate formation of a committee to oversee the implementation of the conference resolutions and to report biannually to the Regional Secretary for Eastern Equatoria, the local SPLA and civil authorities and community representatives on the progress being made. The committee should include representatives

from the local authorities, the military, community and traditional leaders, DOT (names will be confirmed by the Budi County Secretary before the end of August, 2002).

3.17 The conference appeals to all agencies to support the various committees overseeing the peace process (especially with transport), so that they can follow up their activities in a timely manner.

3.18 The conference calls upon NSCC to assist the peace committees with technical assistance and provide independent follow up monitoring on the conference's resolutions by;

§ making a visit within three months to assist the committee in devising an operational plan for the implementation of the resolutions;

§ making three subsequent follow up visits to monitor progress every quarter;

§ making a brief progress report for circulation to the relevant authorities and representatives.

SIGNED BY WITNESSES TO THE RESOLUTIONS

Source: Relief Web: <http://reliefweb.int/report/sudan/sudan-chukudum-crisis-peace-conference-20-aug-2002>