

Momentous Change in Sudan offers Great Opportunities for Continued and Reengagement

KACE-Sudan is appealing to the international donor community that has extended generous support to civil society groups throughout the years of repression and atrocity crimes of the defunct regime of President al-Bashir to renew their commitment to the causes civil society and advocacy groups have been pursuing.

We appeal to our former partners who have decided in recent years to phase out their funding programs in Sudan due to various reasons and to those who stopped investing in Sudan to please reconsider their decisions in light of the momentous changes that took place in the country over the last few months and weeks.

KACE-Sudan explains in the following paragraphs its reading of the people's non-violent revolution that managed to bring down the 30 year-old regime, the risks and challenges that remain, and the opportunities the change avail to civil society and advocacy groups.

Latest Update on the Situation

Sudan is entering a pivotal time in its history. For more than four months Sudanese people have been peacefully demonstrating in many parts of the country. The Demonstrations which began in December 2018 were accompanied by excessive use of force resulting of more than 100 deaths and mass arbitrary arrest and detention. These demonstrations culminated in a sit-in in Khartoum around the military headquarters starting from the 6th of April until the present day April 29th, and is expected to continue until a civilian authority is declared.

After several failed attempts by the NISS and Islamists' militias to break down the sit-in by force resulting in around 20 deaths, and dozens of injuries, the Bashir's generals decided to remove and arrest him on the 11th of April. Junior military officers protected peaceful demonstrators from these armed incursions. Following Bashir's removal, a military transitional council (MTC), was formed to govern the country for a two-year transitional period. The African Union, the EU, the Troika, the USA, and a number of Western countries have echoed calls for a transitional civilian government to be installed, refusing to recognize the legitimacy of the MTC, despite dialoguing with them.

Millions of people continue to control the streets, and the sit-in is growing bigger and bigger as protesters from other cities such as Atbra and Medani headed to Khartoum in order to join it. Negotiations between the Freedom & Change Forces (FCF) representing the revolution and the MTC resumed after the former suspended them for a few days accusing the latter of lack of seriousness. There are two major sticking points on the part of the MTC. First it was reluctant to recognize the FCF as the sole representative of the revolution. Second, they wanted to transform their council into the sovereign council of purely military composition with full sovereign powers whereas the FCF wanted a fully civilian council with representation of the military. After the resumption of the negotiations, the two parties issued a joint statement, declaring that they reached agreement in the first issue, where the MTC declared that it recognizes the FCF as the major leader of the revolution, and therefore it is going to be entrusted by forming the transitional civilian government and the transitional legislative

council. The other issue is still pending, and therefore the two parties agreed to form a joint committee to resolve it.

While agreement has been reached between the MTC and the FCF to install a sovereign council of civilian and military composition, sticking points remain as to the allocation of membership and who of the two would chair the council. The two sides will also need to agree on the respective mandates of the three institutions of the transition: the sovereignty council, an executive cabinet, and an interim legislative body. Agreements would need to be codified in a constitutional proclamation or decree. While the negotiations continue, the country remains at a standstill, with the protests and sit-ins continuing.

Risks

Meanwhile, the deep state remains thoroughly entrenched in Sudan, with vast patronage networks, ideological militias and militarized youth present throughout the country. A spokesperson for the MTC said authorities had raided many homes in Khartoum and found stockpiles weapons, the latest of these raids was declared yesterday Sunday May the 5th where 5 men were detained. There is growing concern that student and other ideological groups who are likely to have gone underground would at one point mount their counter attack through violence and acts of terrorism. Mitigating such risks has to go beyond security measures, to address transitional justice, political inclusiveness, and constructive dialogue that confront the ideological base of violence. Direct engagement of those concerned is vital.

Challenges

Structural corruption remains intact. Though leading NCP figures such as former security chief Salah Gosh have been deposed, they retain a heavy influence, and many have not been arrested, giving them time to hide assets and evidence. Millions of dollars in cash were found in President Omar al Bashir's home, reinforcing conjectures that millions of dollars invested in patronage networks are being held by key NCP figures.

Anti-corruption sentiment has been a key mobilizing factor in the pro-democracy mass protests. Serious documentation and prosecution of mega corruption must be undertaken and all ill-gotten gains recovered for the national budget.

War and peace, justice and accountability remain the biggest challenge facing the transitional period. Resolving these issues appropriately will put Sudan on the right track leading to the future. A number of MTC members have been implicated in atrocities against civilians in conflict areas. President Bashir's indictment by the International Criminal Court on international crimes in Darfur still stands, and it is unlikely that the MTC will turn Bashir over to the ICC. It is more likely that he will be tried by a domestic court, igniting concerns amongst victims that they may not see justice properly done. Mohamed Hamdan Daglo, known as "Hemeti" leader of the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), is second in command of the MTC. Hemeti has been implicated in several atrocities in Darfur, South Kordofan, and Blue Nile. Transitional justice is vital to resolve these issues.

Existing laws remain on the books that suppress the fundamental rights of the Sudanese. The reform of these laws to align them with the best universal human rights standards is also vital.

Opportunities

The revolution also opened a whole world of opportunities. People got their rights back, and are already enjoying them. KACE is now back in Khartoum by the legitimacy of the revolution. We declared our return from the heart of the sit-in, where we erected our tent and resumed our functions publicly, instead of underground. It is expected that there will be full-fledged freedoms of expression and association. The transitional government is expected to carry out whole sale law reform and institutional reforms. Notorious laws, such as the public order law, the press law, National Security law, the Trade Union Law, and civil society law will all be reformed. Civil service and the judiciary will be restructured. Civil society is expected to thrive.

KACE's role

KACE is now faced with what to do next as a leading Sudanese civil society actor and key figure in mobilizing youth activists. Civil society must catalyze on the opening of space and international attention on Sudan to reinstate their roles as advocates for change. KACE has a critical role to play in establishing a just, democratic and inclusive state. KACE has been largely acknowledged by civil society in its coordination role during the demonstrations, both in the immediate sense by leading documentation efforts through its network of Sudan Crisis Map monitors in Sudan, as well as the vast amounts of youth networks trained by KACE as well as its implementing partner in Sudan, the TRACKS Centre for Training and Development.

KACE has begun the process of re-opening an office in Sudan after it was forced to close by authorities in late 2012. Before being forced to close in late 2012, KACE served as the most prominent and effective organization in the country engaging in grassroots activism on taboo topics, such as institutionalized racism, the connection between identity and war, cultural and educational reforms and women's rights. Based in a residential area in Khartoum, a unique strength was the accessibility to reach the Sudanese public and youth. Whereas civil society in the past had often not engaged substantively outside their networks due to security concerns, KACE programming facilitated conversations amongst wider networks and outside of the traditional actors. Outreach to the public and networks of youth activists allowed discussion of topics such as identity and race and placed them at the center of national debates in Sudan, including and empowering traditionally marginalized groups. We have sought to create alternatives to digital engagement by organizing physical events at a very grassroots level, organizing events in homes and engaging small groups. KACE has employed these strategies to hold trainings in private homes, engage in research through one on one interviews and support a mobile Cinema Club where critical rights-related films are screened to different constituencies, particularly youth, across Sudan.

Pro-democratization efforts and reform of the existing system of governance in Sudan is urgent. The defunct system, through its National Congress Party (NCP), facilitated the destruction of the political, social and cultural life of the Sudanese people, dismantling key educational and cultural institutions and sacking any government officials with more reformist and pro-democracy visions of the state. This will not be done overnight. The roots of Sudan's armed conflicts lie in a conscious state policy of marginalization, particularly of ethnic, religious, and cultural minorities.

Genuine political dialogue requires an environment in which the Sudanese people can exercise their legitimate right to express their views. This will be essential to create the national consensus needed to find sustainable responses to Sudan's deep political and economic crisis. KACE will work to increase solidarity and unity among reformist forces in order to engage in a long term,

sustainable educational and awareness raising campaign. KACE will seriously pursue the establishment of an FM radio in order to reach a wider public.

KACE's mandate

Al Khatim Adlan Centre for Enlightenment (KACE) was founded in 2007 to promote a democratic, multicultural Sudan in which human rights are respected. KACE pursues this by seeking to create spaces of engagement, knowledge-sharing and constructive dialogue to facilitate the spread of enlightenment and the promotion of positive human development. We aim to develop democratic modes of behavior, to encourage freedom of thought and freedom of research, promote comprehensive equality in dignity, rights and opportunities between all Sudanese regardless of gender, religion, ethnic, cultural, social, ideological or class background, and to reinforce peaceful and civilized debate amongst different groups and sectors of the society. KACE is a well-respected civil society organization in Sudan and plays a critical role in convening civil society actors, including human rights defenders.