

## **Eyes on Sudan: Winnipeg Peace conference draws attention on Sudan's Conflict**

By Agou Anyieth Kur

From left to right: Dr. Mum Kou, Mr. Douglas Proudfoot, Mr. David Lado, Mr. John Siebert, Ms. Sandy Deng, Mr. William Reimer, Mr. John Amoko.

As the world's attention is fixated on the soccer World Cup in South Africa, a group of university students and Sudanese community in Winnipeg organized a conference last weekend to remind the international community of the threat of war in Sudan as the time ticks away in count down to the referendum early next year. The conference with the theme, "Eyes on Sudan: Working for peace" was organized to create awareness among the peaces advocates, academics, Canadian politicians and relevant government officials who deal with the Sudan issues. The group began working on the conference early last winter in response to political situation in Sudan toward the April elections that saw an increased brutality by the Khartoum government, which threatened, and tortured those who were expressing their rights to participate in the elections and held opposing views. The group was further concerned about the implementation of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, particularly on the referendum for South Sudan, Abyei and the popular consultation in Nuba Mountain and Blue Nile. Darfur problem was also one of the concerns that the group wanted to be address in the conference.

### **Concern over Peace before, during and after referendum**

It took the organizers some months to bring together high profile Speakers among them Mr. Douglas Proudfoot, the director of Sudan taskforce in the Canadian ministry of Foreign affairs and international trade, Dr. Mom Kou, a professor of African Affairs at the University of Khartoum, Dr. Ahmed Hamid, a Sudanese physician from Darfur who had participated in Darfur peace talk in Qatar. Mr. William Reimer from the Mennonites Central Committee. Mr. John Siebert, executive directive of Project Ploughshare- an organization that does research on peace and conflict based in Waterloo, Ontario. Dean Peachy represented the University of Winnipeg that host the conference through its global College (Research and dialogue institute). While St. Mathews Anglican Church was represented by Rev. Dr. Cathy Campbell.

Participants listen to the presentation

The conference was well attended by Sudanese who came dressed in Suits and well prepared giving a proof that they came to talk about matters of great importance and concern. They were also joined by members of peace advocacy groups call Winnipeg Alliance for Peace who had planned their annual match on June 19<sup>th</sup> which coincided with the Sudanese conference and were happy to join hands as their leader Mr. Michael Glen puts it, “We create awareness in Canada on issues of peace and human rights in places such as Iraq, Afghanistan. We appreciate being approached and will take Peace in Sudan as one of our agendas”

While welcoming the participants to the University of Winnipeg, Dean Peachy, the head, of Global college explained the role of global college as, “a centre for dialogue, teaching and research on the practical human needs especially in the areas of peace and conflict around the World.” He added, “On behalf of the University of Winnipeg, we appreciated to be part of this conference on Sudan peace and we are happy to be helping in little way on matters of peace and justice in Sudan.”

### **No light in sigh at the end of tunnel**

However, it was Mr. Madit Buot commonly call Mwalana (lawyer), a Sudanese elder with law degree both from Sudan and University of Manitoba who stated their concern in organizing the conference, “We as Sudanese Canadian are blighted to do something because with CPA, our people who suffered for many years saw a glimpse of hope but it may be short lived like the Addis Ababa agreement.” He observed that, the trends of the last five years since CPA was signed in 2005 are that the government in Khartoum has not been honest. He expressed what has been said many times by Sudanese and conflict experts in World bodies such as the UN that the coming referendum in January 2011 may result in war between the South and North if the results are not honour or if the exercise is not held on time. Continual breaching of the CPA's protocols such as demarcation of boundaries between the North and the South, formation of Referendum commission and constant threat of war by NCP hardliners including the recently appointed Sudan Minster of foreign Affairs and Bashir himself supports this observation.

### **Sudan's problem and Sudan's Wars**

Dr. Mom Kou, Professor of African Studies at the University of Khartoum

Professor Mom Kou was the keynote speaker of the conference. In his lecture entitled, “CPA and problems in Sudan”, he took the participants through the history of Sudan from independent in 1956 to the present. He cited the fact that Sudan is “Historically diverse country in terms of geography, people, cultures, social-political organizations and religious”. He added however,

despite this diversity, a “few minority of Islamized and arabised individual has marginalised the rest of the country in South, West, East and North as well. He pointed out that those who overthrew a democratically elected government in 1989 were less than two hundred individuals from the group of Muslim Brotherhood led by Turabi and Bashir. Prof Mum further explained the marginalization by the few in power in Khartoum in the way Darfur, Eastern Sudan are not develop yet they were not fighting the government when SPLM was fighting the North.

### **Independent not Separation**

On his part, Dr. Ahmed Hamid began by correcting the notion that South is going to separate but rather, “South Sudan is going to achieved her hard fought independent for freedom and Dignity and Darfur people will respect it” which drew wide applause from the audience. He continues, “Darfur will follow the same footsteps unless the country is transform into a democratic and just state.” He sees what the successive government in Khartoum do, not a Islamalization but Arabization, “after all if the issue was religion, then why is the Sudan government killing Darfurians who are Muslim”, he wonders.

### **Canada’s role in Sudan**

Mr. Douglas Proudfoot, Director of Sudan task force; Canadian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Trade

The audience had an opportunity to hear from and to be heard by Mr. Douglas Proudfoot, director of Sudan’s task force at the Canadian ministry of Foreign affairs and international trade. He began by explaining his job as, “leading Canadian diplomatic effort on Sudan issues such as supporting the implementation of CPA, helping in Darfur peace talk and support UN-African hybrid force in Darfur, support peace in Eastern Sudan and reconstruction in Sudan in general.” He said that Canada’s role in Sudan is guide by “whole of government approach” policy that mean all areas of Canadian government are involve from security led by Canadian forces personnel in UNMIS and in African/UN hybrid force in Darfur, RCMP police personnel training police in Southern Sudan to Humanitarian effort being spearheaded by Canadian International development Agency-CIDA. He added that Canada co-chair with the Unites States a donor group called friends of the UNMIS based in New York. Mr. Proudfoot said that Canada in the last four year has contributed a total of \$ 750 million to Sudan’s peace building effort.

### **Choice over Peace or War not Separation over Unity**

On the referendum, Mr. Proudfoot said that is important that it be carried out on time and the result be accepted no matter the outcome. He said that, “real choice is not between unity and separation because that will be up to the voters of Southern Sudan to make but rather the choice is between war and peace”. He pointed out that the North and South will continue to be

neighbours and will depend on each other for trade and economical ties. He underscored an important observation that “the time now is four o’clock here in Winnipeg and it is already morning in Sudan and that mean we are one day closer to referendum and remind us of great work to be done”. After the lecture session, the conference had questions and answers session with the four panel members made up of Mr. David Lado, the chairperson of SPLM chapter in Manitoba, Mr. John Siebert, and Director of ploughshare project, Ms. Sandy Deng, school councillor with the Winnipeg school Division and a daughter of legendary singer Nyankol Mathiang Dut from Abyei. William Reimer from the Canadian Central Committee who had work in Sudan with the operation Life Line Sudan for many years was also among the panel.

### **More and visible Canadian role in Sudan**

The audience sought to know why despite all what Mr. Proudfoot said about Canada’s role in Sudan, there is no discussion in Canada on Sudan’s Conflict. The audience also reminded him that Canada may have contributed large amount of money to help in solving Sudan conflict but what is need more is public discussion on the conflict in Sudan and Canada need to do more by putting pressure on Sudan’s government to implement the Comprehensive Peace Agreement and bring to conclusion the Darfur peace process. After the panel, audience was served Sudanese foods prepared by a group of Sudanese women who plan to open food service business in Winnipeg.

Sudanese Youth Participants helped serving the food

### **Success**

According to two members of the organizing committee, Rev. Ruben Mayen Garang and Mr. David Mabior Atem, the event was a great success beyond their expectation. This is the first high profile event attended by Sudanese Canadians in Winnipeg on issues of peace and conflict in Sudan. They saw the presence of Mr.Proudfoot, Director of Sudan task force as the great accomplishment because it gave the audience the opportunity to hear from the government’s official in charge of Sudan file what his government is doing in regards to implementation of CPA, especially the referendum in Southern Sudan and popular consultation in Nuba and Blue Nile. It was a chance for the Sudanese Diaspora to express their concern to Canadian government especially their well-founded worries of the chances of War between South Sudan and Khartoum government from the dispute over referendum outcomes and over border among other contentious issues.

### **Turning tragedy into celebration**

Young dancers from “Mama Sara group” entertained the conference with Acholi dance

There is no doubt to Sudanese and the international community that the conflict in Sudan has been a great human tragedy of this century. The war has claimed over three millions lives and brought great suffering and destructions. However, a lesson and inspiration can be borrow from the ongoing Soccer World Cup in South Africa and the hope and celebration it brought not only to the South Africans but to the people of the continent and the rest of the World. World Cup came to South Africa because the World united in confronting and dismantling the Apartheid System and in its wake came Mandela's Rainbow nation dream. The World need to unite in solving the tragedy visited upon the people of Sudan by Bashir's genocidal and fundamentalists led regime in Khartoum so that the words of Dr. John Garang can become true, "peace will bless us once more with hearing the happy giggling of children and the enchanting ululation of women who are excited in happiness for one reason or another"