

## **STATEMENT BY JOHN DOR, GOVERNOR OF UNITY STATE, SUDAN**

(May 2001)

I have come to Sweden at the invitation of Lundin Oil to attend a press conference in order to present the views of my people about the impact of oil companies in our area.

After having secured the invitation I made sure that I should come fully equipped with facts and the latest information regarding the issues in question. Hence I made a fact-finding mission in the State and beyond. I climbed my car and visited all the provinces that comprise Unity State. My first stop was Leer province where I used the famous Rubkona-Koch-Leer road you may well be aware of. I also went to Mayom, Rubkona and Pariang provinces. I wanted to see Niemne and Chotyiel villages but time and security arrangements didn't allow it.

I held rallies and had individual and group audiences with tribal chiefs, local officials, politicians, and militia commanders. The issues raised and discussed ranged from crop failures, internal displacement, to oil companies activities and their impact on the communities. Some well-enlightened intellectuals raised the issue of alleged forced displacement they usually hear from the international media. I noted the consensus opinions on these various issues. I have come here as an eyewitness and to convey to you the public opinion of Unity State population.

Before I should proceed with my presentation I would like to remind the honourable audience that the issues in question (forced displacements, use of oil proceeds to fuel the war, human rights and ecological issues) are very controversial. Reports have been prepared by various human rights groups, NGO's and government opponents based on hearsay and unreliable sources. Many recipients accepted their contents without exerting efforts to verify them. The drive has been to disinform. Consequently we have lost the truth in the process. Now the only glimpse of truth can be unearthed only if somebody visits the area.

Going back to my presentation, the first impression I had is the infrastructures that sprang up in a very short spell of time. I am a new governor and the last time I visited the whole region was some time back. This time I was stunned by the progress the state experienced. New all weather roads traversed the state – northward, southward and westward. These roads have cut short, long distances that in the yesteryears nobody could dream of.

The Rubkona-Leer road, the newest and the most active among them, was built by Lundin Oil. This road has brought life back to the southern part of the state that was virtually cut off completely. New villages, schools and Kraals have sprung up along the road. Old ones came back to life. Nowadays Kuach close to IPC rig site inhabits about 2000-3000 people. I would freely admit that the settlement process that took place at Rubkona-Leer road did not have a counterpart in other road extensions. But the paradox is that many reports concentrated on forced displacements in this part of the state.

Actually this is the area that has never experienced any forced displacement, instead people have moved in from other parts of the state. The reasons are obvious. Local militiamen control most of the road and give psychological and physical protection to the people (SSIM under the command of James Liah and Peter Phar). The two commanders are in Khartoum nowadays negotiating for more peace arrangements with the regular army in the area. However, there are times when SPLA under Peter Gadet launches surprise attacks on SSIM

forces. For fear of Peter Gadet many citizens prefer to take refuge in Bentiu or Rubkona towns temporarily. As soon as the situation normalises, they move back to their villages.

The Nuer people lead a semi-nomadic life. During the dry season they leave their homesteads to take their cattle to grazing areas called "Toch". They come home in the rainy season to cultivate. Generally speaking it is difficult for government regular troops to move outside their trenches situated in the big towns or military check points.

The road has brought many benefits to the local people. Before this road could reach Leer, a sack of Sorghum, the staple food in the Sudan cost about \$90 in Leer it has now dropped to less than half. The NGOS and health workers can now move freely from town to village without problems. I met teams of Guinea worm workers and immunisation program against measles and Polio and other child disease eradication program in Leer, Mayom and Pariang during my latest tour. A bus service has already been launched between Rubkona and Leer as there are also merchant's cars loaded with food and non-food items moving to various destinations.

Lundin Oil in co-ordination with the state government has set a comprehensive rehabilitation program for schools, water wells, hospitals and electricity power stations in the southern province. We must admit that Lundin Oil is implementing all these community services prior to exporting a single barrel of oil.

I discovered that the western oil companies, Lundin and Talisman are very popular in the area not only because of their services they have offered to the local communities but because of their integrity, transparency and their commitment to do more. Many local groups identify themselves with them and express their support very vehemently. Besides roads, bridges, airstrips, water installations, health centres they have constructed, these companies encourage local communities to engage in capacity building process. Many projects have been adopted in their budgets to eradicate poverty. The people I met demanded what would happen if Lundin Oil moves out. Who would replace Lundin – the Chinese or the Malaysians? This feverish campaign against oil companies in the southern Sudan may end up harming the very people everybody claims to have a moral responsibility to represent.

The conflict in Sudan is three-dimensional – there is the political aspect, the cultural aspect and the development component. The contentious issues admitted by the conflicting parties in the Sudan show that the present situation in Sudan is a result of poverty, underdevelopment, economic social exclusion of marginalized people especially in the southern Sudan and other remote areas of the country.

The solutions of this conflict lie in the adoption of a strategy to alleviate poverty and to create conditions for socio-economic development of the neglected areas, a process the Lundin Oil company and Talisman are already committed to implement with enthusiasm. But unfortunately some human rights groups, NGO's and government opponents are calling these oil companies to pull out without proper replacement on the ground because they think that oil revenues may fuel the war effort. This oil is now at the shores of Port Sudan and the pull out of western companies will never salvage the situation but with all probability will aggravate it. Many oil companies without moral obligations to human rights or service oriented will jump into their shoes and the good work the local communities enjoy now may disappear overnight.

The Addis Ababa agreement of 1972 failed because it failed to address the real causes of conflicts in the south – poverty, underdevelopment and the economic exclusion of the Southern Sudan. The central government did not give enough financial support because it had no real resources. No multinational companies existed to tap the natural resources of the South to carry out development. Now, despite the war, the stakes are that development in the southern Sudan may accelerate faster than in the North if oil exploration and development operations continue uninterrupted.

Of course everybody in Khartoum is happy about the oil proceeds. But the government priority is not to utilise oil revenues for armament. The cost of construction of oil installations, especially the 1610 km oil pipeline from Unity to Port Sudan, the Khartoum refinery which cost about \$670 m and other accumulated debts are priorities to be settled.

The general debt is about \$20 bio including roads and power installations constructed on debt loans. Besides, the government is committed to alleviate poverty by embarking on improving social institutions and raising wages and salaries of government employees (this year the wage rise has reached 15%). All these commitments may distract the government from concentrating on armament. In addition there are attempts to allow an international commission to foresee the spending of oil proceeds.

In conclusion, I would like to state that all the people of Unity State and many people from the Sudan in general whom I had the chance to talk to, would prefer oil companies to continue working in the oil fields. Even opposition groups outside and inside Sudan voiced their support. The outspoken government opponent, advocate Ghazi Suleiman, is a diehard supporter of western oil companies in the Sudan. Many people say that lack of development in conjunction with deep social and economic disparities is one of the root causes of the civil war in the Sudan. The assistance to the local communities will carry the foundations for the social and economic infrastructures of peace in the Sudan.

Hence peace will not come to Sudan because Lundin Oil is given pressure to quit, peace will come to Sudan if Lundin is allowed to extend basic health services, basic education and training, basic social infrastructures to the people of the area. Meanwhile, we combine our efforts to give pressure through our governments to the conflicting parties to stop the war through IGAD peace initiatives or any other international forum.