



House of Commons  
CANADA

# Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development

---

FAAE • NUMBER 027 • 3rd SESSION • 40th PARLIAMENT

---

EVIDENCE

**Thursday, October 7, 2010**

—  
**Chair**

**Mr. Dean Allison**



## Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development

Thursday, October 7, 2010

• (1530)

[English]

**The Chair (Mr. Dean Allison (Niagara West—Glanbrook, CPC)):** Order, please.

I want to welcome everybody to the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), we're going to be meeting with the representative from the Sudanese Women Empowerment for Peace. We've got Madam Elswawi here today, as the program coordinator. We want to thank you very much for being able to speak before our committee.

You have some opening remarks. We'll give you a chance to do that, and then we'll informally go around the room and probably follow up with some questions.

Once again, thank you for being here today. I'm going to turn the floor over to you and you can maybe introduce yourself and then get into your remarks.

Thanks.

**Ms. Zaynab Elswawi (Program Coordinator, Sudanese Women Empowerment for Peace):** Thank you very much.

My name is Zaynab Elswawi, and I'm the coordinator of the Sudanese Women Empowerment for Peace. We call it SuWEP.

SuWEP actually is a movement that is working for the betterment of Sudanese women, to strengthen and empower them politically, socially, and economically.

As you all know, the women of Sudan have come a long way in their struggle not only to be heard, but also to have a positive and lasting influence for the people of Sudan.

Let me start with telling you about SuWEP, how it started. I'll take you back to 1995, to the Beijing conference, where women from all over the world met together. Women of Sudan from both north and south met in Beijing. By that time they were very hostile to each other. Women from the south were actually looking at women from the north as if they were the government of Sudan, and it was the same from the point of view of northern women, so the first meeting wasn't actually nice.

They were supposed to do a performance on the stage and the northern women actually thought that they were the only women of Sudan, women who were presenting Sudan, so they started singing. The organizers gave them five minutes. After two and a half minutes, the southern women came to the stage and told them, your time is

now finished, the other two and a half minutes is ours and we want to show the people the other part of Sudan. That created a tension between them.

Then they went to something called the Peace Tent, where people go to talk and fight and just say what they have in their heart to each other. After a couple of days, they actually came together and they started to talk to each other. Since then, they started to develop and improve their relationship together. They started to negotiate with each other. They decided that the women of Sudan wanted peace, they wanted to make their voice heard, and they wanted the war to stop now. So they started to negotiate with their political parties and they started to work together.

In 1997 this initiative, this peace initiative, got a boost from the Netherlands embassy. It was called the Dutch initiative, and then after that it was named the engendering peace process, and then for a matter of the ownership they changed the name again into Sudanese Women Empowerment for Peace.

I think this is actually the main start of the peace negotiations, so the comprehensive peace agreement negotiations started with women. Women are the ones who actually led and started and pushed for the peace negotiations, even though they don't take credit for it. But this is the reality.

Since then, since 1997, so many things happened. They participated in the peace negotiations, they always have their agendas set, both women from the north and the south, and they made sure that their voice was heard in most of the peace negotiations in Basha or somewhere else.

They have continued working together until now, and now they are preparing for the referendum conference. They want to have a women's standpoint. No matter what the result of the referendum is going to be, one country or two countries, they want to have a standpoint and they want whatever happens to happen peacefully, with no violence. This conference is going to take place at the end of November.

• (1535)

SuWEP as a movement or a network includes two sectors: the north sector and the south sector. These sectors are actually divided into women from civil society organizations; groups from government, which are organizations that belong to the government; women in political parties; women from the Nuba women; and women from the south in the north.

The same applies to the south. We have four groups in the south.

Working in civil society is not an easy thing in Sudan. We actually face a lot of difficulties and challenges. I'll just mention some of them. For us, simply to conduct training or a workshop, we need to have permission from the government. And this is not an easy thing, because we prepare everything and they keep sending us back and forth and they might just not accept it, or they might refuse at the very last minute. So we always prepare ourselves but we don't know whether these activities are going to take place or not. But we manage to develop our strategies, our ways and means to deal with that.

I remember in 2008 we were preparing for a big event to celebrate March 8. We were more than 60 civil society organizations, and the event was actually big, in a public place. We asked the authorities to give us permission three weeks before the event, and they just kept going back and forth. Every day they would say "tomorrow, tomorrow, tomorrow", until we had just two days left before the event. So we decided to write a letter from different organizations and we all went and applied. One of them succeeded in getting permission, even though it was the same event. So we develop means and ways of doing our things, but there are always difficulties and challenges.

If we want to do training or workshops in Darfur and we are based in Khartoum, this is also not possible. We have to cooperate or do it through an organization that is functioning or operating from Darfur. Or we bring people from Darfur to Khartoum.

Civil society organizations in Sudan are actually divided into two groups. Some organizations belong to the government, and those are the ones that actually serve the government agenda. We call them the GONGOs, the governmental organizations. Some of them are considered to be against the regime, and those are the ones who don't get permission and don't get any financial support or any kind of support, assuming that they work against the government.

But we tried our best, and after a long struggle we have achieved the 25% quota. Actually, the credit goes to civil society organizations, but now the government always mentions it as though it's something they did willingly. Anyway, we have it now. And we have 25% of women in Parliament.

I don't want to mention anything about the quality or quantity of women parliamentarians, but at least we have women in Parliament. And somehow, women know how to get together with each other. So we have developed means of just meeting them and talking to them, because we have one of our groups belonging to the government, so we do meet with them now and then.

• (1540)

We discuss issues that concern women. Somehow we convince them with our point of view, hoping that they will take the issue further to Parliament. I've seen this kind of cooperation, and it always happens within civil society. Women parliamentarians, for example, women from the Canadian Parliament can also exchange experiences with women in Sudan. That might be a good exchange of experiences to address important issues concerning women.

I'd also like to talk about the multi-donor trust fund. I know that Canada has invested a considerable amount of money in Sudan through the multi-donor trust fund. We have a little concern about

that. The issue of gender and gender equality was not well identified in the structure of the distribution of these funds to organizations.

I wonder if there is a way of measuring the changes or the influence that is really happening at the grassroots level as a result of this large amount of funds. I'd like to suggest here that the Canadian government or any other government who allocates financial support to Sudan should consult the civil society organizations to identify the real needs and maybe identify tools, ways, and mechanisms on how to distribute these funds.

The other issue, and the last thing I wanted to talk about, is regarding the financial support to consult the civil society and especially women's organization groups. There are also a lot of concerns about legal reform in Sudan. That includes the age of marriage, rape law, public order, and private law.

I would like to conclude by saying that if women manage to come together during the war, and work together, they can also do that during the referendum. They are actually coming together for the referendum and the future for Sudan. It's possible they can do that together. They deserve Canada and the international community to support them.

Thank you very much.

• (1545)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Madam Elswawi.

We're going to start with Mr. Pearson.

We'll do normal rounds and see how many rounds we can get in today.

**Mr. Glen Pearson (London North Centre, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Elswawi, thank you for coming. We're thrilled that you're here. It's a big issue for us here in Canada, because Canada for many years has had investments in Sudan.

I wanted to ask you about the CPA, the comprehensive peace agreement. I was there in Naivasha and Machakos when discussions were held between north and south. There were words being used about how women must be more included as a result of the CPA if we're going to try to look forward to peace. In your view, did the CPA actually bring about that kind of change, or did it not? Was it more on the ground that you had to make these things happen?

**Ms. Zaynab Elswawi:** Thank you.

Actually, the CPA brought a lot of women to south Sudan. They were guaranteed to have participation of 30% at all levels in the constitution of south Sudan. But that didn't happen in north Sudan. Women from the south benefited from the CPA but not at the same level. Women from the north didn't benefit at the same level as the southern women, I must say. At least these issues were discussed.

**Mr. Glen Pearson:** I agree with you about the donor fund. In the south, for instance, so much money has gone into Juba to develop Juba, the capital in the south. In other regions, hardly anything has gone.

Can I ask your view of that regarding the north? Has it been roughly the same tale, that money has just been invested in certain areas and many of the regions did not see any dividend from that money?

**Ms. Zaynab Elawi:** The whole of Sudan is in need of support. I understand that south Sudan and Darfur are conflict areas and are in need of basic services and just peace. But that doesn't mean that north Sudan has enough funds. North Sudan actually needs a lot of support. Compared with the conflict areas, they need the basics like clean water, schools, and peace.

The issue of the legal reforms that I just concluded my speech with is very important, because if we talk about changing laws, that will not happen without real support.

**Mr. Glen Pearson:** I think many of us are thinking there will be separation with the referendum. The south will choose to go its own way, and many are worried about that. I would like to know what kind of role the women's groups that have helped bring the CPA into being...and I'm aware of that. Should the separation happen, the world community will be watching to see what takes place. How can we help the women's groups from the north and the south make that transition go smoothly?

**Ms. Zaynab Elawi:** I feel very sad when I talk about the issue of separation. Just to witness that by itself is something that drives me emotionally. But it's their right, and if the regime fails to make the unity attractive, then it's the southerners' right to have their own country.

We will be the losers—women in the north, absolutely. The regime has started to take us back to the nineties when they practised their full power against women. They are now threatening us. There are a lot of posters in Khartoum talking about the hijab, women's dresses, and things like that. So I think they are waiting for the southerners to be ready for us to again practise the old way of dealing with women.

Of course, it will be good for the south. It is their decision at the end of the day, and they have the full right. Obviously, the choice is clear that the south will separate from the north. But in all cases, the women of Sudan will continue to work together, because we have a lot of common things that bring us together.

Whether it's separation or unity, we want the process of referendum to happen safely, without any violence.

• (1550)

**Mr. Glen Pearson:** Thank you.

Ms. Mendes, do you want to add something?

**Mrs. Alexandra Mendes (Brossard—La Prairie, Lib.):** Good afternoon. Thank you for being here.

How do you consider that southern women have a good influence on northern women? How would independence and taking away the resources that are currently known to exist in the south affect you women in the north of Sudan?

**Ms. Zaynab Elawi:** The women of south Sudan have it guaranteed in their constitution. They are practising it, because many more women hold important positions in the south than in the north. They also have a gender ministry in the south, and we don't have that. So by constitution it's guaranteed, and by practice it's also there.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

Monsieur Dorion.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Jean Dorion (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, BQ):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mrs. Elawi, thank you for testifying about the efforts of Sudanese women. Aside from the issues that concern women directly, have your organizations taken a stand on matters such as establishing the border between the two new states if they separate? Have they addressed the economic and trade issue of the oil resources being on one side of this potential border and the access to the sea for the very same oil being on the other side?

[*English*]

**Ms. Zaynab Elawi:** Thank you.

Actually, this issue has not had that much attention, not from our organization or any other organization. These things are actually supposed to be discussed with the government, with the two parties together. What has happened is that they have discussed the technicalities of doing the referendum, but not in detail.

We still not only have that border problem, our old economic and trade situation, but we also have the citizenship problem, the owning property or land. These are problems that will appear, and none of us knows how these problems are going to be sorted out because they were not given enough attention.

Sooner or later people will need to sit down and discuss these issues. As I said, they have discussed the technicalities of all the processes on how to conduct the referendum, and that's all, as far as I know.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Jean Dorion:** You mentioned that your organization has two sectors, north and south. Broadly speaking, the Sudanese problem stems from the fact that the people in the south have always felt that they were dominated by the people in the north. I would imagine that, for the smooth operation of your organization...

Based on your account, it seems that the relations between the two sectors are cordial. You have taken some organizational measures. Are there co-chairs? How is the relationship between the two sectors in terms of organization and hierarchy?

• (1555)

[*English*]

**Ms. Zaynab Elawi:** As I mentioned, our organization actually has two sectors: north and south. But at the end of the day, they are a group of civil society organizations.

Our main role is to lobby and to advocate. We are not decision-makers. We give the government our advice, if they take it, or we lobby for some specific issue. We don't have enough power to actually decide on things.

The referendum we are preparing for this conference is mainly going to ask for peaceful, non-violent processes, and win a standpoint for the women of Sudan on that.

The issues you mentioned regarding the challenges that might appear after the referendum are still valid. We are a civil society. We are questioning, the same as you are. We really don't know how the governments of north Sudan or south Sudan are going to deal with them, so we are mentioning the issues as problems that will appear. But we don't know. We really don't know how they are going to deal with these problems. It's not clear yet.

[Translation]

**Mr. Jean Dorion:** I will turn the floor over to my colleague Ms. Johanne Deschamps.

**Ms. Johanne Deschamps (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ):** Good afternoon. I would like to tie this in with the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of UN Security Council Resolution 1325, which will be in October, and the Canadian government's commitment through its action plan to protect women in war zones around the world. Among other things, we want to encourage women's participation in promoting their rights and in ensuring equitable access to support.

In your presentation, you mentioned that funds are not always allocated to grassroots organizations. Where should we focus our efforts? How can we help you with your promotion activities? You also said that you have ties with parliamentarians and women's groups in Canada. Is it possible to continue this experience with a referendum around the corner and assess the progress made since the women from the north and the women from the south joined forces?

We should initiate a meeting between Canadian parliamentarians and the network you have established over there.

[English]

**Ms. Zaynab Elswawi:** Thank you very much for your question.

I think I mentioned one or two ways how to assure, or at least to find ways and means to assure, that the funds reach the civil society organizations. Governments put their financial support in one or two baskets, for example, the multi-donor trust fund. For small women's groups, it's very difficult actually to reach that fund for so many reasons.

First of all, the multi-donor trust fund, for example, was set out or based on the JAM, the joint assessment mission. Actually the JAM didn't mention gender equality. They didn't have really clear gender equality specifics to assure that some part or division or percentage of that fund would be allocated to women. This is one of the things. Gender mainstreaming and gender equality were not mentioned.

The other thing is that the format of the multi-donor trust fund was very complicated for small women's groups. I remember one of my colleagues saying that three professors needed to sit down to fill in those forms. They are very complicated. So small organizations with limited capacity will not be able to apply for the multi-donor trust

fund. So it ended up with the UN agencies, and the civil society organizations also have a lot of problems with UN agencies.

What I suggest is that donors, even through the multi-donor trust fund or the support that comes from government or international organizations, consult the civil society organizations. I don't know how, but maybe if we set up a consultation forum between donors and civil society organizations and make sure that small women's organizations are represented in that forum to mention their concerns, we will be able to set up a good mechanism and tools for this.

Another question is that I don't know how donors monitor and evaluate the influence or outcome of the money. How do they do that, if they don't have a relationship with the grassroots level?

Those are three suggestions that I think might be helpful. Yes, I agree with you that maybe consultations and exchanges of experiences among Canadian women parliamentarians and parliamentarians from Sudan might also be helpful and useful.

• (1600)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

We're going to move to Mr. Obhrai, for seven minutes, please.

**Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Calgary East, CPC):** Thank you very much for coming from Sudan.

I have visited Sudan. I have been to Darfur as well as to Juba. I have a large community of south Sudanese living in my riding who support me and ensure that I am always kept abreast of the happenings in Sudan.

I just came back from Nigeria, and I had a very lengthy discussion with the American Secretary of State on the issue of CPA and the developments that are going to take place on this and the concern of the international community to the Government of Sudan to ensure that the CPA agreement is met. I can tell you this for your information. The international community, both the U.S.A. and Canada, have sent a letter to the President of Sudan to ensure that they stick to the agreement that was signed, as you talked about, to put pressure there.

I would like to hear your view. One of the concerns we have and I have and the international community has, as my colleague from the other side said, is that there is a very strong possibility of the south separating. The problem and what we are concerned about is that the Government of Sudan may use the referendum by saying that it was not an open, fair referendum. It's a very strong issue for us to ensure that this referendum is open, transparent, and acceptable to the international community so it does not become a tool for the Government of Sudan to say that it would not recognize the results of the referendum.

To that effect, I can tell you that the Government of Canada has called in, both from the Government of Sudan and from the government of southern Sudan, people from the electoral commission to train them here in Canada on the process of ensuring a transparent referendum. But the challenges remain, there's no question about it. I think this committee is going to look at the CPA. There is a motion in front of us. We can look further at that.

So there is no question in our minds that there are very strong issues to be addressed, and it is a very fragile situation, as you rightly pointed out. So I just want to assure you that there is a strong international oversight.

I do understand from the Americans that they may be coming out with a new policy. They didn't elaborate, but it will be coming out soon.

For Canada, with this large diaspora, we want to ensure that there is a fair, transparent referendum so that the people of Sudan can make a choice. That would be the key element. Canada of course has contributed very strongly to Darfur. As you know, we have provided a lot of logistic support to the UN mission in Darfur, including efforts to bring peace to Darfur.

I was just giving you this because I'm the parliamentary secretary for foreign affairs, and I thought you should be updated on the facts of what is going on right now. I am interested in knowing from you as an NGO in Sudan, which is quite a challenging thing for you to operate in that restrictive environment, not about the challenges—we know what the challenges are—but about the space that is available for NGOs to play an important role in overseeing the Government of Sudan.

I don't want to put you on the hot seat. As you know, Bashir has been indicted by the ICC. So I'm not going to ask you that question to put you on the hot seat, because you'll be right back to Sudan. So we'll leave that out for the time being.

● (1605)

What I really want to know is do you see the growth of civil society taking place in Sudan? Are you seeing the growth increasing or decreasing? In meeting with the government of south Sudan, which is learning how to govern, could you give us an understanding of the role of civil society, its growth—if there is any? Do you see any restrictions happening? What do you see coming down the road?

**Ms. Zaynab ElSawi:** Thank you very much.

Regarding the point that you mentioned at the beginning about the CPA, the comprehensive peace agreement, yes, I agree with you that the CPA was not implemented in the way it should be.

We all hope the referendum will be transparent. I'm sure there will be observers from the international community and I hope it will be open and transparent. I won't be surprised if something appears from the regime. Now they are starting to send messages in the media and in newsletters telling youth to be ready for war. They are saying the war is coming back again. But I heard positive comments regarding this from other people. They were actually asking, "What war? What is the regime trying to say? We are not going to war again; we've had enough." So they are preparing people for something. As I said, people don't want to go to war any more.

Regarding the space for NGOs to operate, as I was just saying, it's very difficult and we have a lot of challenges. But there is an interesting point here: especially after the case of the ICC, the regime is putting more restrictions on NGOs. But this could play to both sides. If you don't have anything to worry about, why are you restricting NGOs from their work?

Globally civil society supports the government. They think the government cannot raise awareness, so they complement each other. There is no harm. But if you put restrictions and constraints on civil society, that means you have something you don't want people to know about. This in itself is the proof.

We are not going to stop. We will continue. Actually we are increasing, not decreasing, with all these difficulties. Sometimes the regimes feel ashamed of what they are doing, so they try something. But when they find we lobby for it and we make it big and the international community knows about it, they stop for a while. So they want to do it, but what you are doing is the main thing that is stopping them from continuing. So they start and then they stop.

We will continue, and I hope you will continue as well.

● (1610)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

Mr. Obhrai, we're out of time.

We're going to welcome Ms. Crowder to the committee today and turn it over to you, for seven minutes.

**Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank Ms. ElSawi for coming before the committee today.

I was fortunate enough to be in New York for Beijing Plus 10 in 2005 and watched how women across the world worked together on really important issues. So I appreciate your raising the 1995 Beijing conference and the importance it had for Sudanese women.

I also want to acknowledge the importance of gender mainstreaming and gender equality when donor countries are allocating funds and how important it is that this be a consideration. I hope the government will take note of the importance of that kind of work.

I wanted to touch on the women's common agenda. I was specifically looking at some of their recommendations and the campaigns around election periods. These are listed as short-term recommendations. They look like pretty ambitious recommendations when I look at things like equal access to all media platforms, equal access for financial resources. So I wonder in this lead-up to the referendum if women's organizations are getting access to media and resources to help them encourage, inform, and educate women about the importance of this referendum.

**Ms. Zaynab ElSawi:** Yes. Definitely this will be a great chance to lobby for these issues.

The problem with it is that they need support, and of course they need access. The media are controlled by the regime, so with the limited space that we have we try our best to send our message. Even with the newspapers.... Actually, they monitor all the newspapers, and if anything is written that they don't agree with, they stop the newspaper's being issued the day after. These are all constraints, but we try our best to do what we can do.

The women's agenda is another example to show how women can come together. Women from south Sudan had their own agenda. And then in our organization, because we had a draft but we didn't have a final one, we facilitated a round-table meeting and brought women from the north and women from the south together to have one agenda. After we finished with that, with the support of UNIFEM, they put these two together and they brought women from Darfur and from the east of Sudan. So by the end of the day, the one agenda that we have is actually for all women of Sudan: north, east, Darfur, and the south of the Sudan.

This is an example of how women can come together and put their needs and their priorities together and work together.

**Ms. Jean Crowder:** How would you measure progress on the common agenda at this point?

**Ms. Zaynab Elawi:** Some of these things are clear. The 25%, as I said, was a good indicator of the effort by the civil society organizations. But women's issues, apart from the basic things, such as education and health, and all these services, are very.... In terms of legal reform, we don't have that much. We are just now addressing issues of rape laws, issues of public order, issues of private law. We are lobbying for these laws to be changed. But as they haven't changed yet, you cannot actually measure the awareness of people regarding the issues.

We conduct a lot of training and workshops to make people aware of the gaps in these laws, but unless we manage to change them, then we still have a lot to do.

•(1615)

**Ms. Jean Crowder:** Do I have time?

**The Chair:** You certainly have. We'll let you.

**Ms. Jean Crowder:** Okay, thank you. I'm not sure in this committee structure how long you get, so....

**The Chair:** You have seven minutes, and you're just at five, so you're good.

**Ms. Jean Crowder:** Okay, great. Thank you.

I wanted to also touch on exchange. Is there currently a formal exchange between Sudanese parliamentarians and Canadian parliamentarians? Is there actually a formal exchange between parliamentarians?

**Ms. Zaynab Elawi:** No, we don't have one, but as far as I know, Sudanese parliamentarians do these kind of things, extending experiences with other parliamentarians from other countries. I was wondering—and it's just a suggestion—whether this could happen. Maybe you can take the civil society in between, so that you sit with the civil society groups, women's groups especially, and discuss issues of concern, and then you sit with women parliamentarians and discuss the same issues. That might be helpful.

**Ms. Jean Crowder:** I don't know about some of my colleagues, but some of us have been paired up by international organizations, not through the parliamentary system, and have found it helpful for exchanges of information. I was paired up with a parliamentarian from Zimbabwe, not only for exchanges of information, but also around issues of safety for parliamentarians, and that network was organized by an international organization. So even if we couldn't do it formally through the parliamentary system, it might be something that an international organization would be willing to do, pairing willing women in the Canadian system with women who are interested in the Sudanese. It was just a network to share information and ideas, and sometimes it was actually a phone call to say: "Could you get this out in the media? I think my life is in danger."

I think it's a piece of support that some women may be willing to offer, and it will be certainly worth pursuing.

I also want to echo Madame Deschamps' issue around Resolution 1325. Many of us believe that if we don't have women involved, there will not be peace, and many of us are absolutely committed to it. Speaking for New Democrats, I know that our party would be interested in looking at that. If you know of international organizations who would be willing to work with us on that, I can speak to the other women in our party. I think it would be an invaluable exercise.

Thank you for coming today.

**Ms. Zaynab Elawi:** Thank you very much. We really appreciate that.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Crowder.

We'll now go to our second round. I know we have a couple of quick questions here, and then we'll finish up this afternoon.

Mr. Van Kesteren.

**Mr. Dave Van Kesteren (Chatham-Kent—Essex, CPC):** Thank you, Chair.

Thank you for coming.

I want to understand something. I think I do, but I need some clarification. First off, I would say I'm sure there is nobody here who wouldn't endorse this and say we're all for it and want it to happen. In north Sudan—let's assume that there is a split—you stated earlier you're afraid that once the established governments take place the governments will then start to revoke some of the gains you've made. Are you concerned with the north and the south? Or is it only the north, or only the south?

**Ms. Zaynab Elawi:** Well, after the separation it will be just the north.

**Mr. Dave Van Kesteren:** Only the north.

Which is the country of influence in the north at this point? Which country in the world has the most influence in the north?



**Ms. Zaynab Elswawi:** I'm sorry, I didn't get that.

**Mr. Dave Van Kesteren:** Which country has the most influence in the north?

**Ms. Zaynab Elswawi:** Which country, or which...?

**Mr. Dave Van Kesteren:** Which state, or foreign country?

**Ms. Zaynab Elswawi:** Well, all the decisions are made in Khartoum in the Parliament, so—

**Mr. Dave Van Kesteren:** I'm sorry to interrupt, but I would think there is probably.... Are the Chinese very active in the north?

**Ms. Zaynab Elswawi:** Oh, Chinese. Yes, they are in terms of oil, and when it comes to wealth.

**Mr. Dave Van Kesteren:** Have you spoken to the Chinese about this as well?

**Ms. Zaynab Elswawi:** As civil society, no. At least, I am not aware that we have. Do you mean the Government of China?

• (1620)

**Mr. Dave Van Kesteren:** Yes.

**Ms. Zaynab Elswawi:** As far as I know, no. We don't have that much access to governments, so I was really grateful and thankful for this great chance you provided us with to talk to you. But these kinds of opportunities are not available that much to civil society.

**Mr. Dave Van Kesteren:** I'm going to split my time, so I really don't have a whole lot of time. But we do support you. It's very difficult for us—you realize that—to exert pressure on the north. In any way that we can, I know that as a parliamentary committee we would certainly do that, but it's a real challenge. I think you understand that too.

**Ms. Zaynab Elswawi:** Thank you.

**Mr. Dave Van Kesteren:** I'll split my time with Peter.

**Mr. Peter Goldring (Edmonton East, CPC):** Thank you for being here today.

I look at this document here as impressive and certainly totally supportable. I saw a form of this document at an election I was monitoring in Haiti. It was published through the election and it was given to all the parties. I thought it was excellent because it puts forward, certainly, the women's issues through all of the parties, looking for common support. And I really do hope that the initiatives here are followed through.

Along that line, I see in my notes that there was an introduction of Islamic law, Sharia law. Is that a complication to this process, or is it fully integrated into your agenda? Have there been any difficulties or concerns? Has the Sharia law been fully accepted?

**Ms. Zaynab Elswawi:** You know, the issue of Sharia has always been the main thing that concerns the national congress. When they stopped talking about it, it was because of certain people from south Sudan. But after the separation, I am sure the issue will be the top issue again. So we will be back to square one whereby the regime wants to apply the Sharia law again, and I think aggressively this time, because all the signs and indicators are saying that. And of course we, as women, are going to be the people who suffer most from that, because, for them, we are actually more than 50% of the population that can be taken by the Sharia law. They will then be finished with all of us simply by issuing the Sharia law.

**Mr. Peter Goldring:** I noticed that your agenda here had no mention of the Sharia law, in the agenda itself.

Another point on the referendum: I do hope it's a very clear question and the margin of acceptance for it is at 50% plus one. They say in a referendum for separation that that can be hugely problematic, if you do not have a large percentage of people willing to move in a certain direction. Even in the referendum act that we have—the Clarity Act, we call it—it actually raises that bar of acceptance. It mentions in it 13 times that it must be a majority of the people, not a majority of the voters. So that virtually means that if 80% of the people vote, 20% is a de facto no vote.

Do you have that type of thing written into your...? Has it been designed yet, or...?

**Ms. Zaynab Elswawi:** Yes, I think that the referendum will get a lot of attention and concern. Actually, the government of south Sudan is making a lot of effort to make people who are going to vote fully aware of the processes for them. They did that.

I've been to Juba twice in the last six months. Whenever I go, I realize that separation is happening. The last time I was there I spoke to so many people. Nobody supported unity, no one, not even my close friends. It was like, okay, what about us? They simply said, "Well, we'll be good neighbours". That is very sad for me.

They also said that women in Sudan will remain women of Sudan, even after separation. "We still have a lot to do together, but we wish you all the best with your problem facing the regime and fighting for your rights. We cannot afford to fight for you."

Thank you.

• (1625)

**Mr. Peter Goldring:** Well, good luck. Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Goldring.

We're going to finish up with Mr. Pearson, and then we have a little bit of committee business to take care of. I think we're all in agreement, so we'll finish with Mr. Pearson.

**Mr. Glen Pearson:** Ms. Elswawi, I just have a couple of comments before I give you the last word. I think you're remarkably eloquent, and you're brave for coming. I thank you for doing that, because I think as a woman between north and south Sudan, you have the greatest challenge. Our thoughts are with you. I also want to thank Inter Pares for bringing you over. I think that's very important for us to hear.

I want to get to what's already been said and what I asked earlier. All the attention has been about the south. That's just the way it's been for years. You face very unique challenges that southern women don't. We need to know, as a committee, how we can help you. Would it be, as was happening during the war, that you bring women's groups out to Nairobi so that it's easier? Can we fund conferences and things like that where women from the north and the south can come and continue to dialogue? I greatly fear exactly what you've said: the communication that was necessary to bring the war to an end will not stay in place after separation takes place. I think you need the help of the Government of Canada and many others to allow the structure to take place so that communication continues to happen and women's groups keep coming together.

Can you give me some practical suggestions about parliamentarians going over and doing those things or maybe bringing some people here? Do you have other suggestions? How can we help so that this stays together?

**Ms. Zaynab Elawi:** Thank you very much for mentioning that.

Regarding the communication between women, it's very important to bring women together. So far, we are doing that with difficulty. Before signing the CPA, we did that outside Sudan with the support of the Netherlands embassy regarding the Sudanese Women Empowerment for Peace. They met in Nairobi several times. They met in Addis Ababa. They met in Asmara. They met in Cairo. They met in The Hague, because it was difficult for the southerners to come to Khartoum to meet with women from the north. The first joint meeting after signing the CPA was conducted in 2007. That was the first time they met in Khartoum.

I don't know how the situation is going to be after the referendum. We might need to meet outside, as it used to be in the past. We would really appreciate the support of the Canadian government to facilitate that. That would be good support, and we would really appreciate that.

The other thing is to allocate funds for civil society organizations, especially for women's groups, and to consider their capacity. I think that also is going to be a great help. To keep on having meetings like that is also something. Yes, I'm here working on behalf of civil society, but I'm sure that there are so many great women who might do a better job than what I'm doing, much better, if they got the chance, like my colleague, who couldn't get a visa to attend this meeting with me, and she left me all alone. There are so many great women in Sudan. If we can just get the chance to make our voices heard, just to let you know what we've been through, that would also be something. Maybe there could be a forum between the Canadian government and the civil society every other year to address the issues, the needs, and the priorities. This would be a great help, and we would really appreciate it.

Thank you very much.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much for being here today. I also echo the sentiments of our committee members when I tell you we appreciate you taking the time.

I'll suspend the meeting for one minute, enough time to hand out three motions before we go in camera.

Thank you very much.

*[Proceedings continue in camera]*

---







**MAIL  POSTE**

Canada Post Corporation / Société canadienne des postes

Postage paid

Port payé

**Lettermail**

**Poste-lettre**

**1782711  
Ottawa**

*If undelivered, return COVER ONLY to:*  
Publishing and Depository Services  
Public Works and Government Services Canada  
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0S5

*En cas de non-livraison,  
retourner cette COUVERTURE SEULEMENT à :*  
Les Éditions et Services de dépôt  
Travaux publics et Services gouvernementaux Canada  
Ottawa (Ontario) K1A 0S5

Published under the authority of the Speaker of  
the House of Commons

### **SPEAKER'S PERMISSION**

Reproduction of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its Committees, in whole or in part and in any medium, is hereby permitted provided that the reproduction is accurate and is not presented as official. This permission does not extend to reproduction, distribution or use for commercial purpose of financial gain. Reproduction or use outside this permission or without authorization may be treated as copyright infringement in accordance with the *Copyright Act*. Authorization may be obtained on written application to the Office of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Reproduction in accordance with this permission does not constitute publication under the authority of the House of Commons. The absolute privilege that applies to the proceedings of the House of Commons does not extend to these permitted reproductions. Where a reproduction includes briefs to a Committee of the House of Commons, authorization for reproduction may be required from the authors in accordance with the *Copyright Act*.

Nothing in this permission abrogates or derogates from the privileges, powers, immunities and rights of the House of Commons and its Committees. For greater certainty, this permission does not affect the prohibition against impeaching or questioning the proceedings of the House of Commons in courts or otherwise. The House of Commons retains the right and privilege to find users in contempt of Parliament if a reproduction or use is not in accordance with this permission.

Additional copies may be obtained from: Publishing and  
Depository Services  
Public Works and Government Services Canada  
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0S5  
Telephone: 613-941-5995 or 1-800-635-7943  
Fax: 613-954-5779 or 1-800-565-7757  
publications@tpsgc-pwgsc.gc.ca  
http://publications.gc.ca

Also available on the Parliament of Canada Web Site at the  
following address: <http://www.parl.gc.ca>

Publié en conformité de l'autorité  
du Président de la Chambre des communes

### **PERMISSION DU PRÉSIDENT**

Il est permis de reproduire les délibérations de la Chambre et de ses comités, en tout ou en partie, sur n'importe quel support, pourvu que la reproduction soit exacte et qu'elle ne soit pas présentée comme version officielle. Il n'est toutefois pas permis de reproduire, de distribuer ou d'utiliser les délibérations à des fins commerciales visant la réalisation d'un profit financier. Toute reproduction ou utilisation non permise ou non formellement autorisée peut être considérée comme une violation du droit d'auteur aux termes de la *Loi sur le droit d'auteur*. Une autorisation formelle peut être obtenue sur présentation d'une demande écrite au Bureau du Président de la Chambre.

La reproduction conforme à la présente permission ne constitue pas une publication sous l'autorité de la Chambre. Le privilège absolu qui s'applique aux délibérations de la Chambre ne s'étend pas aux reproductions permises. Lorsqu'une reproduction comprend des mémoires présentés à un comité de la Chambre, il peut être nécessaire d'obtenir de leurs auteurs l'autorisation de les reproduire, conformément à la *Loi sur le droit d'auteur*.

La présente permission ne porte pas atteinte aux privilèges, pouvoirs, immunités et droits de la Chambre et de ses comités. Il est entendu que cette permission ne touche pas l'interdiction de contester ou de mettre en cause les délibérations de la Chambre devant les tribunaux ou autrement. La Chambre conserve le droit et le privilège de déclarer l'utilisateur coupable d'outrage au Parlement lorsque la reproduction ou l'utilisation n'est pas conforme à la présente permission.

On peut obtenir des copies supplémentaires en écrivant à : Les  
Éditions et Services de dépôt  
Travaux publics et Services gouvernementaux Canada  
Ottawa (Ontario) K1A 0S5  
Téléphone : 613-941-5995 ou 1-800-635-7943  
Télécopieur : 613-954-5779 ou 1-800-565-7757  
publications@tpsgc-pwgsc.gc.ca  
http://publications.gc.ca

Aussi disponible sur le site Web du Parlement du Canada à  
l'adresse suivante : <http://www.parl.gc.ca>