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## Interview: Abdallah Ahmed Abdallah

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# Sudan, potential Mideast 'breadbasket,' seeks to speak with own voice in Gulf

*Dr. Abdallah Ahmed Abdallah is ambassador to the United States from the Republic of the Sudan. He has served as professor on the agriculture faculty of the University of Khartoum, and as dean of students. From 1974 to 1977, he was vice chancellor (president) of the university, and since has served as chairman of the university's council (regents). He served as minister of agriculture, food and natural resources in Sudan from 1977 to 1980. From 1980 to 1985, he was the first governor of the Northern Region in Sudan. He is a graduate of the University of Khartoum, and earned a master's and doctoral degrees in plant physiology from the University of California at Davis. He completed his studies there in 1963.*

*After the government of President Omar Hassan El Bashir commenced in Sudan in June 1989, Dr. Abdallah was appointed ambassador to the United States. He was interviewed by Marcia Merry on Dec. 3, 1990, in Washington, D.C.*

**EIR:** How do you look at the course of resolution that should be pursued in the Persian Gulf crisis to prevent disaster?

**Abdallah:** The Sudan's position right from the beginning was to provide a diplomatic solution to the crisis within an Arab framework. This position was misunderstood and misrepresented in certain circles in the Western and Arab world.

At the Arab Summit, on Aug. 6, 1990, President El Bashir declared that Sudan does not approve of the annexation of Kuwait. Sudan does not approve of invasion of Arab countries by other Arab countries. The position of the Sudan at that time was that there was no need for condemnation and escalation of hostilities with Iraq. We don't want to immediately create hostilities, and block all channels with Iraq, which are likely to produce a solution within an Arab diplomatic framework. That was our position. We wanted to have that channel open with Iraq.

So that was the real position. We thought that the crisis should be managed in such a way that it should contain the problem, and not internationalize it. Because we have seen that the United States was very quick in coming with its arms. And we were able to see that there would be a buildup of foreign arms in the area. We have realized that the American intervention will create new problems as well as expand the

already-existing ones.

It is clear that our position is different from that of the United States, because we have opted for a different type of crisis management, which will avoid inviting foreign troops into the area.

And we thought that if the Arabs were given the opportunity, and if the diplomatic dimension were given the emphasis it deserves, the crisis could have been solved within that diplomatic framework. Let us remember that Iraq and Kuwait did meet in Jeddah [Saudi Arabia] prior to the crisis. And we know that they have been discussing certain problems relating to land, debts, and oil. There are probably real grievances of Iraq that ought to be considered.

We also thought that as the crisis went on, the West, led by the United States, was dictating certain things and dictating that either Iraq goes out, the hostages leave, the Kuwaiti government comes back, or no talks. It is said that the aggressor should be stopped. The aggressor should not be rewarded. This is all theoretically correct. But the fact remains that there must be a space for diplomacy or else war would erupt.

But it is also correct that a new situation, whether wrong or right, has developed. And it has to be addressed in a political fashion. There are certain things that can be agreed upon now, and others that can be left for future negotiation.

There is evidence that some people are trying to understand the position of the Sudan. Saudi Arabia has understood to a large extent the position of Sudan, and acted reasonably towards Sudan.

**EIR:** What are the economic effects of the Gulf crisis?

**Abdallah:** There is a severe impact on the developing countries, and particularly on the least developed countries. They are suffering very greatly from the increasing oil prices. And the people who are poor, who were working in the Gulf, who were making remittances to their countries, are now going back home.

The countries are losing the remittances, and getting the people back who ought to be absorbed in a growing regional economy. And they have to be rehabilitated, and most of them were just doing menial jobs in the Gulf.

The West is considering sending support to Egypt, Tur-

key, and Jordan—countries which are called “Front Line.” A meeting in Rome of an entity called the Coordinating Committee, has allocated \$14 billion to help these three countries. However, the most needy of the countries that have been hit hard by the Gulf crisis are the least developed ones, particularly on the African continent—Sudan, Uganda, Kenya, Burkina Faso, and others. Unfortunately, these countries are not being considered for immediate support.

Although the World Bank is coming forward with certain “flexibilities” in their loan-making, and has established a new facility to deal with this situation, I am not sure if these initiatives will match the magnitude of the problem.

**EIR:** You are a specialist in agriculture. How would you describe the food-producing capability of the Sudan, which has been called the potential breadbasket for the entire Middle East?

**Abdallah:** The Sudan has a strategic role in this area, for many reasons—geographical, political, cultural, and because of its agro-ecological potential. There is great physical potential, in terms of water, land, and climate. And the Sudan has the human resources to realize this physical potential.

The country occupies a position surrounded by markets, basically to the north. You have in Egypt 60 million people who ought to be fed. And this is where the idea came that the Sudan is the breadbasket for the Middle East, even for the larger region. The Sudan is a great breadbasket resource, but this resource needs investment and technology for its development.

First we speak of Sudan as a very large area, the largest country of Africa. Also very important is that it extends over a very long distance from north to south, and therefore, it has long extension from Egypt down to Uganda. So you have various agro-ecological zones, from the very arid north—which is almost desert, then going down to the wet tropical zone. In between you find this gradation of savannah—from the arid to the high savannah to the thick savannah to the subtropics. And therefore you see that this variety of agricultural zones lends itself to a variety of agriculture production, whether it is crop or animal. You can go from pasture and grazing, to the tremendous potential for diversity of agriculture in the south—tropical fruits, tea, coffee, pineapples, and myriad products.

There is a gradation of rainfall, from nothing, in the north, to very high in the south. The Nile provides perennial water for irrigation. And there is underground water. You have three sources of water resources—very important for agriculture. So if you speak of ecological opportunities, the land and water resources allow for a great wealth of crops and livestock.

In addition, there are mineral and oil resources yet to be put to use.

**EIR:** The Egyptian geologist Farouk El Baz has done work

on the “Big Camera” on satellite overflights to locate the presence of underground water in the western Egyptian desert. Does this extend into the Sudan?

**Abdallah:** Yes. It is called, this big underground river, the “sandstone aquifer.” It is in Egypt and Libya, and a good part of it is in the Sudan. The aquifer’s importance is that it is located in a place where there is no rain. The Nile, of course, limits itself to its banks. You can’t go very far from the banks. Just like agriculture in Egypt—a narrow strip along the Nile, irrigated agriculture in the Sudan is also limited to the narrow strip around the Nile.

We have our own limited share of the Nile waters. We have about 20 milliards [cubic meters] out of 84 milliards, under the Nile Agreement [a treaty between the Sudan and Egypt in 1959]. Of our share, we have remaining only 2 milliards more to use, and then we will have exhausted our share. Therefore, we look to the many other possibilities. One is to revise the agreement. Or, better still, you can go into more efficient and rational use of water available under existing schemes. Or you implement new schemes to capture more water from the Nile.

There is a lot to be said about more efficient and rational use of our water. We have been using water rather loosely, so there is a big scope for better utilization of the existing share of water in terms of cropping intensities, increased production per unit area, per unit labor, per unit water. All of this can be done.

It is possible to increase the water resources available from the river through various works on the Nile, including heightening of Roseires Dam, constructing new dams, and including completing the Jonglei Canal itself which will provide water downstream—about 4.5 milliards to be shared equally between the Sudan and Egypt. These works would capture additional water from the Nile, outside the 84 milliards which is already known.

So although it is limited, there is still scope for increasing our cultivated area, and increasing our productivity from the existing area.

After considering the utilization of river water and groundwater, the other water resource is rainfall, which in the Sudan increases as you come from the north to the south. It covers what you call rain-fed farming areas, in the central, the east central and west central parts of the Sudan. In this region, there is staple crop production, which is sorghum and bullrush millet, and there are both traditional and mechanized farming practices.

Therefore, there are three subsectors of agriculture: the irrigated, using the water from permanent sources; the rain-fed farming, using traditional methods for both cultivation and livestock; and finally, mechanized rain-fed agriculture.

The traditional rain-fed agriculture is farming by small farmers on about 5-10 acres, using their own traditional implements, and producing under conditions inherited from their fathers, with little or no improvement in technology.

These farmers produce food crops of sorghum and millet, and oil crops such as sesame and groundnuts. They also usually mix cropping with livestock. The herders are nomadic or they can be transhumant.

The mechanized farming is in the clay areas, mainly in the east, the center, and somewhat southward. This is where we use tractors and implements to produce mainly sorghum, millet, and some sesame. This is the sector that produces the surplus food output, mainly sorghum, and also sesame. This sector has what you could call large-scale farming, but still under rainfall.

**EIR:** In the 1970s food was exported from the Sudan.

**Abdallah:** That is right. Until very recently, there was some sorghum exported to Saudi Arabia. Until maybe two years ago or so, until 1988, when we had a good crop. There was some surplus at that time. Over the last 10 years, whenever there was a surplus over the level of self-sufficiency, there was a policy of the government to export 300,000 to 500,000 tons of staple food—sorghum. But this was only done as a policy when they were certain that there was an amount for the full year, and some stocks over that, and some feeding stocks also.

The problem is that 70% of our staple food—sorghum—is produced by rain-fed agriculture, either traditional or mechanized. The other 30% of our sorghum is produced in the irrigated sector—in the irrigated schemes of the Gezira and along the Nile.

You immediately see a problem here of food, because we produce 70% of our staple sorghum food under rain-fed conditions, and rain-fed farming is characterized by its variability. The coefficient of variation of rain in the Sudan is extremely high. The variability may occur from one year to the next year, and there may be variability within the crop season of the same year. This is one of the main problems resulting in droughts. And this explains the problem that the people are talking about now.

You see, people are talking now about famine in the Sudan, about shortage of food. What happened actually is that in 1988, there was a good year, good rainfall, and therefore very good production. To the extent that we exported, and we had what we call reserve stocks for the coming year. And nobody spoke about food in the Sudan. You never heard anything.

But in 1989, the rainfall was less than the 50% of the long-term average. That's very low. And therefore we had production that was about two-thirds of what we usually get. So if we are getting, say, 3 million tons of sorghum from the rain-fed, in that year we got about 2 million—which is a significant drop, if you lose one-third of your sorghum.

This is 1989. You never heard anything in 1989. Because 1988 was very good, and there was a carryover of reserve stocks in the Agriculture Bank stores. This more than filled the gap from 1989. There were at least 800,000 tons of stocks



*Cotton being loaded onto a Yugoslav freighter berthed at Port Sudan on the Red Sea. The cranes shown in the foreground were paid for by a World Bank loan. At the time this picture was taken—1962—the only technology Sudan had inherited from the British was related to cotton, the export crop promoted by colonial policy, while the World Bank refused to encourage any improvement in traditional rain-fed agriculture to grow food.*

in the Agriculture Bank. And there were stocks in the hands of the farmers and local agencies, and so on. So we were able to endure in 1989 without anybody speaking about the famine.

Now we are in 1990. And the rainfall is exactly the same as in 1989, and even worse. It is again less than 50% of the long-term average. So we have had two successive years of rainfall below the 50% long-term average. And therefore, we do not inherit any food from 1989, because we have consumed it. So with the season being bad in 1990, this is why that anybody would expect that we would have a food-gap. Especially in terms of sorghum and bullrush millet.

When we in about August 1990, realized that the rainfall was not good in 1990, and there were actually some crop failures, and particularly in the surplus producing areas of the rain-fed mechanized farming, then the government got alerted that this is going to be a second season of problems. And usually when you have two seasons, or three seasons, then you have a drought. And then it is followed by shortages in food, and escalation of prices which will adversely affect the poor sectors of the population first. Usually two to three

years of very low rainfall are followed by even a famine sometimes. This is what happened in 1984-85.

So what did the government do? And this is where people [critics and the media—ed.] don't get into it; they just speak of 11 million people being under risk and so on. But immediately in August, when the government realized that the rain was bad, they sent to the FAO [U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization] to ask for what they call crop assessment—for them to use their expertise to help the crop assessment for the year 1990. So that the government will have a credible assessment of the crop failure and establish a credible estimate of the food gap. That is the first point.

Two, the government immediately alerted the farmers in the irrigated sector to increase their acreage and their sorghum. Remember that I told you that 30% of our sorghum is produced in the irrigated sector. This year they used what they call "cut-off" areas, areas that had been intended to go into cotton, but for some reason did not go. This was done as a crash program. The government told the tenants and the farmers in the irrigated schemes: Any land you have, put it immediately into sorghum. We will provide the water, and the other inputs. The government will provide. So that is the second measure they have done.

Third, we grow wheat in the winter. We plant it in November. So the government made arrangements so that the coming wheat—the wheat that is planted in November and December—to plant *extra* areas of wheat. Up to a million acres of wheat. They are now implementing it. That wheat will come in about April.

The crop in the irrigated areas is already being harvested now. It is coming in all right—the prices of sorghum are already declining in the markets, but it is not sufficient to fill the gap.

So these are the kinds of measures that the government has taken, but the government is not given any latitude in the press in the West. The politics of the thing is to pose the Sudan as a country of famine, with people at risk, people going hungry and dying, and portraying the government as not helping its own people—the government not declaring the famine so that we (the United States) can come and help. So if you want to come and help, why do you want there to be a declaration of a famine to make you come and help, as a donor?

**EIR:** What is the latest news in terms of the U.S. State Department's demands that the Sudan declare a famine, and perhaps other conditions for food shipments? There are many cases of agencies and non-governmental organizations, both in foreign policy and in domestic practices—even inside the United States, for example—using food emergency, or natural disaster, or famine as the excuse for imposing extra-legal means, police-state powers, and so forth.

**Abdallah:** I think the U.S. government officials are reconsidering. We have talked to them about the realities of the

situation and that they should address this, and not be influenced by prejudiced media such as the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times*, and Roger Winter [head of the U.S. Committee for Refugees], and certain of these, and even some of their own reports from Khartoum are sometime not accurate. And we had a dialogue, and I think they are changing their minds in a way. They are not now talking about a demand for famine declaration. They are now talking about waiting for the assessment of the FAO to be clear, so that the position is solidified, so they are willing to talk to the government. They want to see the government also coming forward to help, and to let some of the non-governmental organizations work with them. There is now what you could call softer, low-tune talk, rather than the heated rhetoric about famine and devastation, and that the people are at risk, which was the case some months ago.

Food variability is a characteristic of the rain-fed agriculture not only in the Sudan, but all over Africa. Even in the United States. In 1988, you had a drought. Nobody could avert it, because it was just an act of rain, an act of God. This is exactly what happened in the Sudan. Think about it. Two successive years of low rainfall, followed by the food shortage. The Sudan government did not hide it. They asked for assessment. They asked for assistance.

I emphasize the need for what we call "pre-positioning" of food for the people for whom the crop failure is hard—the people in northern Darfur, and northern Kurdufan. These are fragile environments, whose people are hit first. They are rural people. Poor people. They don't have much to dispose of in terms of animals and things so that they can buy food. So I alerted, about three or four months ago, that we need what we call "pre-positioning" for people like this to avert them moving. Because immediately what they will do, when they see their crop failing and they see that their animals are starving, is move. There is no pasture of course, because of the lack of rain. Then immediately they move. They move to help, to where they think the aid is. They will move to where they can even beg for food. We will need some pre-positioning of food, so that the people who are least capable of coping with the situation, will have help.

**EIR:** On Oct. 2 this year, the United States gave orders that a ship en route to the Sudan, with a commercial shipment of 45,000 tons of U.S. wheat, be diverted to Kenya. In September, the International Monetary Fund declared Sudan to be a "non-cooperative member." In November, the head of the U.S. Committee on Refugees, Roger Winter, asked Congress to impose a trade embargo against the Sudan. Washington officials deny taking punitive action because of Sudan's position on the Persian Gulf crisis; they claim they are only interested in furthering "effective" food relief!

**Abdallah:** They did divert one ship with 45,000 tons, but we received another 45,000 tons transported on two other

ships. The total contracted food-for-sale shipment was 90,000 tons. The 45,000 tons were diverted as punishment to the government of the Sudan for alleged hindrance to the Operation Lifeline/Sudan. If this is not using food as a weapon, I would not know what it is.

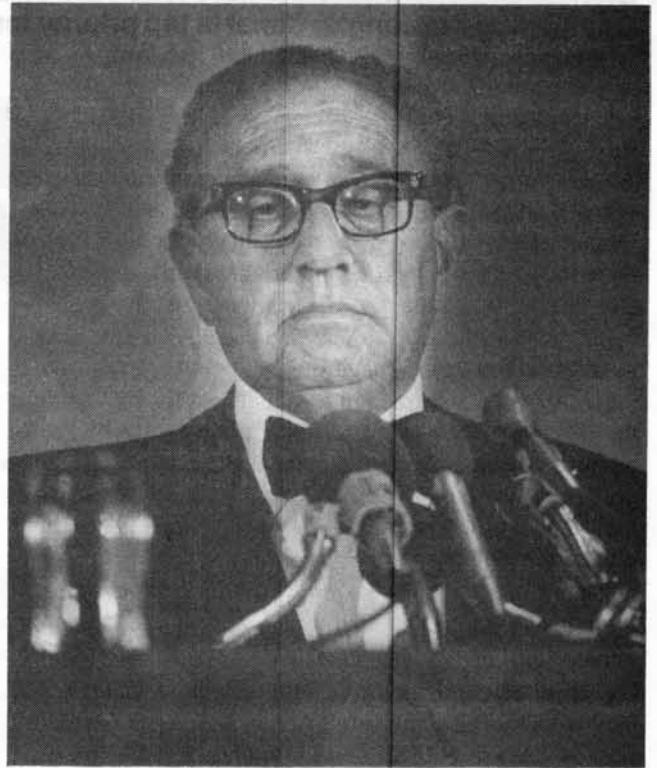
So we have 50% of our wheat. This is not the relief food. This was purchased. The U.S. has also been coming forward with relief food. They have pledged about 100,000 tons of relief food—not sale to the government. Already some of it is in the south, from Nairobi, and some of it is approaching Port Sudan, but there is still about 40,000 tons of the 100,000 wavering. But their internal decision is yes, and I think it is now firmed up. It is part of Operation Lifeline. In this they are not addressing the new situation, they are addressing the old situation as part of Operation Lifeline. But they are also willing to come forward to face the new situation after it is firmed up by the reports of the FAO. This is the situation now. They have been coming into the old Operation Lifeline by this 100,000, and they are willing to come into the new situation developing with other donors. And they are willing to ask other donors to come forward. But they tie this: They say, "We want to come to some agreement with the government." Because they think that the government has not been helpful in the last two or three months in Operation Lifeline. That the government has been deliberately putting impediments and obstacles in place. I am not saying there are no problems and no obstacles. There are some. But we should all remember that Operation Lifeline/Sudan faces complications of a continuing war.

**EIR:** Henry Kissinger's name is associated with the policy of using food as a weapon. At present he is demanding warfare in the Middle East, and over the years, since at least 1974, when, as Secretary of State, he spoke in Rome at the founding of the World Food Council, he has demanded that food be used as a weapon. There are many examples of the obstruction of water and agriculture development projects in the Middle East and Africa under these policies.

**Abdallah:** We have examples here.

Our rain-fed sector has been neglected for a very long time, in terms of technology, investment and infrastructure—rural drinking water, and so forth. And the livestock sector has been very much neglected. This has been a policy of the past, unfortunately extended by our own early governments. I say of the past, because the colonial policy was to promote crops for export, mainly cotton. And they completely neglected the food crops and other crops. We inherited very little technology for these food crops and other crops that are of potential. The only technology that we inherited from the British—30 years ago now—was related to cotton, merely to cotton. The research station was almost called, "Cotton Research Station."

Therefore, when I was minister of agriculture in 1978, '79 and '80, it was very clear to me that the agriculture



*Henry Kissinger, architect of Middle East wars, oil hoaxes—and food as a weapon.*

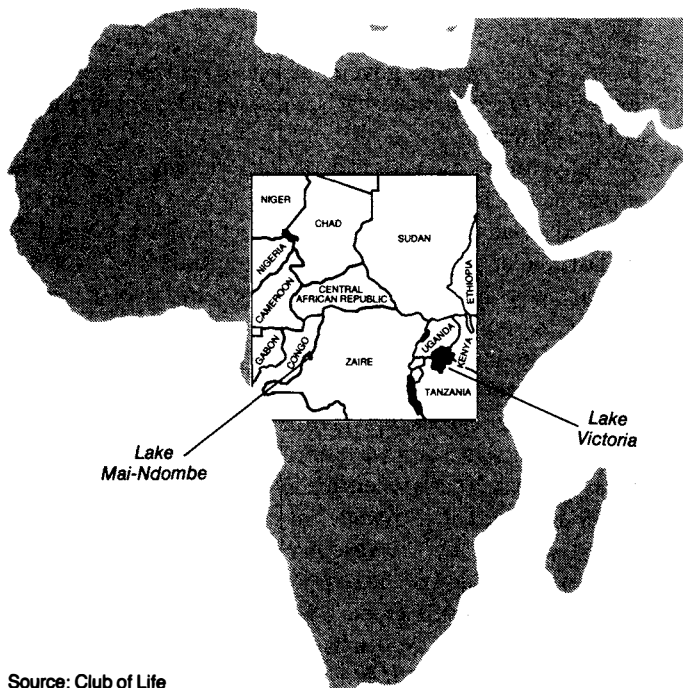
research capabilities in the Sudan were very much directed toward export crops. And very little attention was given to traditional agriculture, where the bulk of the food comes from. And I say this, because I immediately wanted to direct attention to the development of our traditional agriculture. I spoke at that time about what I called a "judicious balance," between our irrigated agriculture for export, and our traditional agriculture for food.

But at that time, the World Bank—particularly the World Bank, and many of the bilateral donors—would not encourage any work in the improvement of traditional rain-fed agriculture. They would rather go to irrigated agriculture. And you can go now to the World Bank and ask them about their projects in the Sudan, and you find that it is almost 70% in the irrigated sector, which is cotton and other irrigated crops.

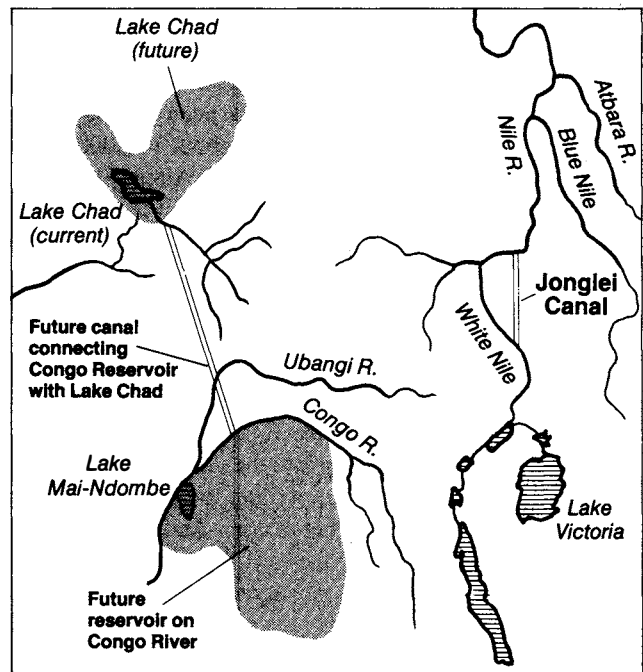
After the 1980s, there was a diversion towards more attention to the traditional sector. In the early 1980s, we initiated two projects. One was to direct agriculture research to unlock the potential in the west.

We have seen the agriculture potential in the west for staple food crops, and also for other crops that are rain-fed but can be exported like groundnuts and sesame. We argued for extension of agricultural research into the areas of rain-fed farming—grains, livestock, and also groundnuts and sesame. Therefore, we got a big project in agriculture extension

## Completing the Jonglei Canal is top priority for Africa's development



Source: Club of Life



that was about \$50 million at that time.

Then we also initiated with the World Bank and other donors another project in the west, called Western Savannah Development Corp., in order to develop the livestock, the pasture, the grazing, in order to unlock the potential in the traditional savannah area of the west.

Both of the projects were operating after 1980. Prior to that, donors were involved in projects that we can call "donor driven," rather than those desired by local government and the wishes of local people. Because you are poor, when somebody says, "Well, here is \$20 million. Put it into agriculture in the Gezira" [the large irrigated project], you may say at the time, "Well, I would like it better if the money were put into traditional agriculture." But when they say, "No, we will put it into increased cotton production," you don't say, "No, because increased cotton production is also good." You say, "All right." But we call this, "donor-driven" investment. It has been the donors in the 1980s who have been doing the driving, based on their own perceptions of development, and emphasizing export crops rather than the development of agriculture. This is a basic fault.

**EIR:** There are dramatic examples in other parts of Africa of exporting specialty crops by air cargo, while people are hungry.

**Abdallah:** They export spring onions, bell peppers, eggplants, musk melons from Uganda, Kenya, and Ethiopia.

They export flowers—carnations, and so forth. I am not saying that going toward export crops is bad, but there must be a balance, a judicious balance where we do export and get some foreign currency, but at the same time we retain our own control, our own food production. This is very fundamental.

**EIR:** The postwar agencies—IMF, GATT, and the others—were set up in the name of promoting commerce and betterment, but they have been involved only in promoting "donor-driven" investments, and have opposed even the attempt at food self-sufficiency. The U.S. proposal to the GATT on the agenda in Brussels would make it a treaty violation to even attempt food self-sufficiency. But there is a revolt in Europe and Japan and other nations to overturn this.

**Abdallah:** There are even different terms. You are supposed to say food "self-reliance," not self-sufficiency! But there are food security decisions.

For example, when we realized that the rainfall is not good this year, the minister of agriculture asked the farmers to plant more irrigated area. We need to discuss very seriously and in depth, in our irrigated farming, should the cropping pattern that exists now be continued? Or should we alter it in favor of food security?

Because if we are planting 400,000 acres of cotton, and 100,000 acres of irrigated sorghum, should we alter this ratio now? And there is acreage in groundnuts. We have a certain

cropping pattern in the big irrigated schemes which we inherited, and we have continued without question. Now we are experiencing droughts more frequently. Therefore, I think it is time that we should look into our agriculture policy, and how we can really balance between our irrigated agriculture and the traditional rain-fed and mechanized rain-fed agriculture, with a view towards focusing on food security and also on selected export crops.

Food and exports are not mutually exclusive. They can go together, but it depends on how you maneuver the whole thing. It is easily said, but it is very challenging how to come up with a real, on-the-ground mechanism—a way of ensuring your food security, and at the same time also exporting, so that you can import some inputs for agriculture itself. Until we make our own fertilizer, we need to import fertilizer. We need to get insecticides. We need to get machinery. And this means the dollar or sterling. We cannot get that dollar, because we do not have oil to export.

We have only agricultural products to export so far. So we must say, “What should we export? Livestock? What kind? Sheep? Or cattle? Should we export all of our sheep and cattle, and eat only poultry and fish in the Sudan?” These are questions that have got to be asked.

**EIR:** What has been the impact of the pattern of World Bank, IMF, and donor interventions in Sudan?

**Abdallah:** The agriculture in the Sudan in the 1970s and the 1980s almost stagnated. And there are many reasons. Most of them are structural reasons.

Decline in agriculture growth is mainly due to the cumulative influence of certain structural factors, including neglect of resource maintenance (land), misdirected investment—which was not based on proper land use planning—and the degradation that happens to the resource, for example to the pastures. Causal factors include the variability of rainfall, the poor maintenance of the irrigation networks, the lack of fuel, lack of spare parts, inadequacy of inputs.

But to me the structural factors are more important, in terms of the ecology—the degradation of resources, of infrastructure, and of government policies, such as misdirected pricing policies, and so on. These are all very important in the decline and stagnation of agriculture that has taken place.

Because of stagnation in agriculture, we have had the stagnation of our economy, because agriculture is the backbone. The agriculture sector was not given due attention. The structural and other causal factors were not really or squarely addressed by the repeated governments and so on, in terms of the policies of research, exports and food production.

The country itself is very large. You can produce food in one area, but to haul it to the other area is difficult. The roads are very bad in Sudan. It was important to address these things very early on, but most of the bilateral and all the multilateral donors, did not come forward to help in the infrastructure. They should have. If Sudan’s infrastructure

were put first, in terms of roads, railways, drinking water in the rural areas, if this had been given priority at the beginning, it would have been the basis for agriculture development and development of the economy. But there was no directed plan, and the government policies were generally not helpful to production, that is, there was a lack of incentive to the producers.

The railways are very bad, and deteriorating. There is a project in which the World Bank is helping in the rehabilitation of the Sudan railways. This project has been going for the last five or six years or so, and very little of it is being implemented. Implementation is always an issue. Because sometimes you have the World Bank and other donors in a project, one donor can stop the signing for a year or two. Only one donor.

One of the reasons why investment was not consistently coming forth was that it was supposed to come from the oil-rich Gulf areas. That’s where the money is. In the late 1970s, there was an idea of a “triangle” of development potential, in which the “elements” are: resources, money and technology, and also the position of the country. The technology you can buy. You can buy tractors. Some of the technology was already in the Sudan. Sudan has the resources, and it has the geographical position. It is in the heart of the region. The technology could come from the West. It can be bought. The money could come from the rich Arab countries. There was the Arab Authority for Agricultural Investment and Development (AAID), created for investment in Sudan, to produce for the whole region.

This was created by a number of rich Arab countries. It is headquartered in the Sudan, and it was supposed to address itself to development. It is functioning now, but its pace was slow. And of course, some of the obstacles are that the infrastructure in the Sudan is poor. And you know these people who want to come and invest, they do not want to invest in infrastructure. They want to invest and get the return money immediately. And the Sudan government is not able to construct infrastructure in terms of roads, communications, etc. But these are the kinds of projects that the World Bank and the IMF rarely get into. It was left for the other funds, and the Arab funds.

Everybody who comes, wants to invest close to Khartoum, where there is the airport and the roads. But our potential is more towards the remote areas, and nobody wants to invest in the west, because there is no road to connect this to Port Sudan on the Red Sea, so that they can ship.

So Sudan has that potential, and these are some of the problems that there are. And the political stability, the war in the south, the droughts—all of these have been obstacles not to allow this dream to come true—of the breadbasket.

And also, investors, you know, they want to invest in quick-return things. They want to put their money in a bank in Europe or in America that will get them high, insured interest rates.

**EIR:** What is the story of the Jonglei Canal?

**Abdallah:** The Jonglei Canal is a very important development project for the south, and for the Sudan as a whole, and for Egypt. This was done only by Sudan and Egypt themselves. There was no help, or very little, except in some of the parts. The project itself is a very important project because it has got several points.

It was developed as a project to divert the White Nile water away from the swamps, because this was a water resource that was lost by evaporation. And also the water spread over a very large area and made it nonproductive, except for fish or so. And also, this swamp area was one of the reasons for the lack of mobility and exchange of people from the north and the south. It was also a big area for mosquitoes and such things—a health hazard.

So the basic reason was to divert the White Nile water away from the swamps. One, to capture this water, and make it available downstream to the rest of the Sudan in the north, and to Egypt. And it is a combined effort. The cost is a combined effort between Sudan and Egypt. The water captured is also halved. It is about 4.5 milliards, or so, half of it will go to Egypt and half to the Sudan. So this is one advantage. Having increased water for irrigation for Egypt and for the Sudan, in its areas in the north where it isn't.

Two, it diverts the swamps and creates new lands that are productive for agriculture. Instead of being swamps. And this will create another Gezira in the south—you know the Gezira—because it is going to create new lands that are productive. About 2-3 million acres are going to be created.

It will provide an excellent, credible navigation system. Because in the swamps you cannot navigate.

The two banks of the canal can provide roads for transport, because there is an embankment on the side of the canal. On the top of the embankment, it is very broad—about 10 meters or so, even more. It is a very good road. It is also an airstrip. It is the longest airstrip in the world! Over 180 kilometers.

The canal is the opportunity to have a really integrated development, and what you call rural physical infrastructure and rural public infrastructure—in terms of education, in terms of health, in terms of nutrition. A lot of these projects were started alongside the canal. Many people at the time were talking about the Jonglei Canal as an ecological hazard: “Why do you transform the people from a natural habitat where they are happy, to a new situation where you don't know?” Happy with malaria, malnutrition. Happy being naked. Not getting around. With dying at an early age.

So the government at that time was very aware of this criticism. They directed that the canal should be not only physically dug, but at the same time that there should be rural infrastructure, to help the people who should be transformed from the swamps to a new situation. And there was a good program going on. Unfortunately digging stopped because of the war in the south. More than 51% of the digging has

been completed.

**EIR:** What about the foreign hand intervening to foment social strife and stop projects?

**Abdallah:** I think that if you take the conflict in the south, you can see that foreign intervention is obvious. There are some very root causes, real causes for the conflict. Some of them are cultural, historical, ethnic, religious, and developmental. But also the continuation of the conflict has been helped very much by external factors. And you can take Ethiopia as an example, which has been housing and nurturing the SPLA [Sudan People's Liberation Army] as an example. They have got their broadcasts from there. There are training camps. They move from Ethiopia into the south, and they go back into Ethiopia.

The influence of Israel is also clear, especially lately. There is evidence that some some SPLA people have been trained in Israel.

I think the situation is that some look at the Red Sea, and think that it should not be “Arabized.” This also is another factor behind foreign intervention. And then there are also multinationals that are either religiously motivated—the churches—or otherwise. It is clear that the rebels depend on external sources for their arms and provisions. These are all foreign interventions coming in. And some of this is coming in because there are those who visualize the war as Islamic versus Christian, which is not true. And therefore, probably they view it as strife of cultures. They don't want to see Islam or Arab as culture.

The Sudan people I think are one of the most tolerant people when it comes to Christian and Islam. So there are some external factors that have been very influential in keeping the conflict going, and not leaving the situation completely Sudanese. We think the conflict should be internal, not internationalized. It has to be contained. And I think that if it is really contained within the Sudanese context, it can be solved.

**EIR:** You have spoken of the human resources, in the agriculture potential of the Sudan.

**Abdallah:** There is the water potential and the land potential, which is very large. We are only now utilizing about 10% of our land resource, of arable land—good lands. And we have the human resources.

Sudan is 23 million people. Although it is not a very crowded area, there is the human resource. And it is not only a human resource, it is also a relatively enlightened human resource, if you compare it to many other African countries, or developing countries, in spite of its poverty level. The people are to some degree very enlightened people. And they can take technology. They can realize policies. They are politically aware people, and people who are easily motivated. They can be mobilized. We had problems with governments, but as people, they are a great human resource in the Sudan.