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## Interview: Dr. Ali Elhag Mohamed

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# One doesn't need the IMF or World Bank to survive

*Dr. Ali Elhag Mohamed, Sudan's minister of economic planning and investment, has just been named Sudan's federal affairs minister. He led the Sudanese government delegation at the peace talks with SPLA rebels in Abuja, Nigeria, which went from April to June. Dr. Ali Elhag presented the results of the talks at a press conference in Bonn, Germany on July 13.*

*In his briefing to the press, Dr. Ali Elhag explained that the Sudanese government had sent a high-powered, ministerial-level delegation to the Abuja II talks, which represented the first face-to-face talks with SPLA rebel leader John Garang's group, without mediation. The Nigerian government had invited the Sudanese government April 6, when Garang was in Abuja; at that date, Garang was not prepared to meet, and suggested April 26.*

*However, when the talks opened on April 26, Garang left for Europe and the United States, and was received by the Dutch government.*

*In the United States, where he met twice with the State Department and once with the secretary general of the United Nations, he tried to organize foreign support for an intervention, and the creation of "safe havens." This, Dr. Ali Elhag characterized as "sabotage"; "Here we are with ministers to discuss, and John Garang is in Holland calling for intervention."*

*Garang arrived back in the Nigerian venue of the talks to block a final communiqué; the talks were adjourned, on the suggestion of the host country, until June 19, after Nigeria's elections.*

*Following those elections, however, Nigeria entered an internal crisis, and the talks have not been continued since. Dr. Ali Elhag rejected the proposed "safe havens" on the grounds that Garang, who has lost militarily, is supporting foreign intervention to shore up his position.*

*In talks held in Nairobi with another rebel faction which has split from Garang, agreement was reached on a number of issues and included in a communiqué. Following his discussion with the press, Dr. Ali Elhag granted the following interview to EIR.*

**EIR:** Regarding the peace negotiations, one issue has been the application of *Sharia* (Islamic law) in the South, where the population is Christian, animist, and Muslim. Has there been progress made in the negotiations on this point?

**Dr. Ali Elhag:** I think that in Abuja II we solved some of these issues, because we acknowledged that the problem in the South has been there for years—in 1955 when the war began, in 1983 when it was started again—so we have to address these issues first. It is important, because people discuss the problem in the South as if it were all related to the *Sharia*.

We have the view that even if *Sharia* were abrogated today, that would not solve the problem. So we said, as far as *Sharia* is concerned, our projection is that they fear that with application of *Sharia*, the non-Muslims will be second-class citizens. Now we said, if that is your fear, let us put it categorically in the Constitution, that our criteria for holding any post—President, [minister of] defense, anything—is citizenship, not religion. So that solves a lot of the problems as far as political rights are concerned.

We came to the question of penal law. Regarding personal law, everybody has the right in North and South, regardless of religion, to apply the personal law he likes, he believes in. So personal law is not a problem. If you are a Christian, you can bring up your children Christian in the way you like.

**EIR:** By "personal law," what do you mean?

**Dr. Ali Elhag:** Law relating to marriage, education, belief. This is personal law. Whether to drink or not, for example, is a question of personal law.

When it comes to penal law, there's an area, where you say, in the South, if one commits a crime, theft for example, he will not be subjected to the *Sharia* penal code, but will be subjected to other punishment (according to custom), imprisonment, or whatever.

Between you and me, that seems to be acceptable to most of the people. But because of the outside world and the media, who are saying that *Sharia* is the problem, they themselves, the rebels, are hostage to that media. The media come

and ask them, do you accept *Sharia*, and they say no. But we have, I think, reached a breakthrough, because in the past they were talking about abrogation, and now they discovered that no government will abrogate *Sharia*.

In Nairobi [in talks with the other rebel faction], we made a lot of progress. We wrote it down in a way that in the North, there is *Sharia*; in the South, people can have customary law, or any other law. We left it loose. The fact remains, even during the reign of *Sharia*, it has never been applied in the South, and it was applied wrongly in the North; but if the law is applied wrongly, that does not mean that the law is wrong. We think the breakthrough in the discussions is there, though it has not been nailed down in writing fully.

**EIR:** Peace in the region is not only an internal Sudanese matter. There have been serious tensions with Egypt, around the Halaib issue, as well as around Egyptian allegations of Sudanese support for Islamists. In this light, the meeting between Sudanese President General al-Bashir and Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak in Cairo, at the opening of the Organization of African Unity conference, came as a pleasant surprise. Can you tell us more about these talks?

**Dr. Ali Elhag:** I think that the discussions were very frank, because most of the things the Egyptians think about us were not brought up. The question of the Iranians, the [alleged] so many thousand Iranians in Sudan, is not true. The President told Mubarak, "It is not true, if you think there are groups, show us the photographs."

Even the question of terrorism, this is also not true. After all, Sudan does not export anything; if anything we are recipients. We do not export Islam, we are recipients. Where did we get it from? From Saudi Arabia and Egypt, this is a fact. The question is that there is a real problem inside Egypt. . . .

**EIR:** One real problem for all the countries in the region is the economy, and specifically the policies demanded by the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Can you tell us how Sudan is facing this?

**Dr. Ali Elhag:** The recipe of the IMF is not workable. Take Sudan, for example: The IMF had been supporting all military governments, the last one was [Gaafar] Numayri's military government, which received a lot of money, nobody dared to say that it was military. Now the IMF, in spite of all that, all they knew about the corruption, all the schemes that were financed, were directed by the IMF, eventually nothing came out of them. That applies to elsewhere in Africa. Now we have declared our policy to be that we are depending on ourselves as far as the economy is concerned.

In the last four years, we have not received a single penny from the IMF or World Bank or anybody, and we are very proud, because we think this is the only way you can develop a country, and now it has proved to be so. We are proving to the whole world that the illusion that if you don't have a dollar or the World Bank or IMF with you, you will perish,

that that is not true. If you take our GDP [Gross Domestic Product] today, it is more than what it was. [Our growth rate] was 4%, now it is 13%, by the IMF standards. We have a food surplus, so we are quite satisfied with our program. We think that the way the IMF is behaving might turn out to be a blessing in disguise, as far as our government is concerned. If you take a place like Egypt, Egypt is still dependent on wheat from America, France, and Australia. That is a very big invoice, to import up to 6 million metric tons of wheat every year from the outside. That is a real problem. We have solved that problem.

The economic situation in Egypt is also one of the factors, but also the suppression of the Islamists is a problem. The thing is a problem of the western countries' approach. If there were free elections in Cairo, the situation would be better in the sense that probably President Mubarak would not be there. But in the final analysis it is the choice of the people, not the choice of America. We are living in a very different world; when it comes to America, you want the Americans to choose what they want, when it comes to Algeria, you want the Americans to choose for them, the same applies to Sudan. This is very ironic. That's the real situation.

And now you take the United Nations Security Council, that's not democratic. In the U.N., the Security Council with its 16 members, they have the power, while the General Assembly, which represents the whole world, has no power. It's not democratic at all. We in Sudan are free to talk, and we are free because no one is giving us anything. Even if they gave us something, we are not going to stop talking. That's the most important message. Look at what is happening in Somalia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, and nobody talks. That's not acceptable, by any standards.

**EIR:** Do you see any possibility for a change, an improvement in relations between Egypt and Sudan, particularly regarding economic cooperation?

**Dr. Ali Elhag:** I think that the political situation might improve a lot and the question of Halaib, etc., I think all will come to a solution. But for Egypt to have real economic change depends on political will. The Egyptian people are very capable, very able, they are enlightened, better educated, more sophisticated, they don't have any tribal problems, they have more than 7-8,000 years of history, they are more capable. But unless they have got the political will, it cannot improve. Political will can not be acquired, it has to be there, and that is the challenge.

Because if there is political will, then you can tell your people, forget about the wheat. We told the Egyptians, come and have 1 million acres of land from Sudan, along the Nile, and you can cultivate wheat, take 2 million, because we have 200 million acres of arable land in Sudan. But they don't because they are afraid of the Americans. That's not our problem, it's their own problem. So I think it all depends on political will, when it comes to the economy.