

Fact vs. fiction about slavery in Sudan

by Angelo B. Beda

Angelo B. Beda, who has a long history as a political leader in the southern part of Sudan, gave the speech excerpted here to the April 20 Schiller Institute conference. In 1994, Beda moved to Khartoum, to serve as deputy chairman of Sudan's transitional National Assembly. He was recently named minister for public services.

I've had a lot of experience in the politics of southern Sudan, and in the politics of the nation. I started my political life in 1978, which is almost 20 years now in politics. This is half of the average life of our people, because of the hard economic conditions. I'm here to talk about slavery. But before I come to that, I will talk about my experience. I'm not an academician, but a politician.

What is southern Sudan, in short? The problem that it has today was created by the British colonial administration. It ruled Sudan in such a *funny way*—a way in which it didn't do in other countries. Yes, it used the policy of "divide and rule" generally, but in Sudan, it divided southern Sudan from northern Sudan for reasons not written. Northern Sudan proposed to be Muslims and Arabs; southern Sudan proposed to be African, and possibly pagan, according to them; and they wanted to make it Christian. But what followed, was that after 50 years, when they were going away, southern Sudan was down; we were being taught in the tribal languages, vernacular. In vernacular, you read and write in your own dialect. And so you are not supposed to reach the outside world. In northern Sudan, they developed the people and established a system of education, including economic infrastructure and civil society. In the south, we were to hate the north, as Muslims and as Arabs. When I was born, when I started to read, this is how I saw things. I could write in my language. I could read only the Bible; there were no other things to be shown to me. And those who learned a little bit of English, were taught by the Italians, who didn't know English themselves. The Italians were recruited from southern Italy, taken to England and taught some six months of English, and brought as missionaries to southern Sudan. The British were too high-up, too elevated, to live in the south. . . .

Dominated by anthropologists

Southern Sudan was dominated by anthropologists. Anthropology is no longer very popular, but at that time, anthro-



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pology was the most popular subject at the University of Khartoum. This leads me to someone that the last speaker [Lyndon LaRouche] had mentioned—E.E. Evans-Pritchard. This was the man sponsored by the British to live in the south. He wrote about the tribes in the south; he didn't write about any tribe in northern Sudan. I met him, I was at the University of Khartoum; he just looked at me as a Zandi. He wanted me to tell some tales, and to translate some of the documents that were written in Zandi into English. So, anthropology was to study the culture of primitive man; and so you could learn the policy of keeping primitive man in his place. The idea was that people were afraid that the world and all the communities would develop, and then in the future it would be difficult to find a man in his primitive state.

So, southern Sudan was to be made a human zoo, so that you could see a man in his primate state. That's why no economic development was put in since the British left; no roads, and if there were roads built, the size of the road was in such a way that only certain types of cars could pass on it, to keep law and order.

Thanks to God, the British left; I don't know the movement that caused the British to leave. But when the British left, the north and the south didn't know each other; the northerners were educated by the so-called British, who appeared to us as our saviors from the north. And so we hated the

northern people, who were trained, who were able to administer us. And so, when they came to take the places of the British, we were taught quietly to rise against them, and we did, killing a lot of northern officials who were brought in as teachers, administrators, engineers, doctors. We killed as many as we could. And then we were asked, why did we kill them: We said it was because “we wanted the British back.”

War started before the British left

So this is the background. However, we do blame the northern people, and mostly the traditional rulers who came to power through the multiparty system in the north, because they did not try to know us and approach us in a way that we could understand. And so, the war between the north and the south started before the British left. Our independence was announced on Jan. 1, 1956, but the war had broken out in August 1955, five months before independence. Since then, we have never had peace; we never understood each other; we lost confidence in each other; there was nothing that could be done by a northerner that could be believed by a southerner, and vice versa. . . .

A small committee produced what [Sudanese President Gen. Gaafar] Nimeri came to implement in 1969-72. . . . This was a semi-federal setup, and it enabled us to enjoy peace for the first time in 10 years, 1972 and 1982.

Our traditional leaders, who got power from the British, told Nimeri that unless you destroy that thing, Allah will punish you. And this is how the second war broke out. Nimeri cancelled that agreement, without going through the rules that had been established to amend this agreement—general consultation of the people.

Since the war broke out in 1983, no government has been able to handle it; no government was able to sit at the table with the rebels, *except this government*. It had defeated Nimeri himself; it defeated the transitional government between the end of the Nimeri government and the elected multiparty system. . . . I was an elected member of the constitutional assembly during the multiparty system. I was the leader of Southern Sudan Political Association in the Assembly. The only thing that we were discussing at that time was *sharia* law—and I was against *sharia* law, and even now I’m against it. But now we finally have a consensus. We have found a solution how to go around it in a just way. But in this earlier Constitutional Assembly, the Umma Party were 103, the majority; the DUP was 63; and the National Islamic Front was 51. The southerners, plus the Nuba people, were 38. We moved a motion to cancel *sharia* law . . . but when it came to voting, nobody stood with us. But with this government, now we have come to a consensus that the south be exempt from *sharia* law . . . and we have decided to run our system on our customary law.

But what is relevant here, is that people take up our case when their interest is involved, including Baroness Cox.

When [Sudanese People’s Liberation Army rebel leader] John Garang was in the forest, first of all Nimeri was in conflict with [Libyan leader Muammar] Qaddafi, and Qaddafi wanted Nimeri to be toppled. The national opposition against the Nimeri government who were northerners—the same thing that is happening now—went to Garang and introduced him to Qaddafi. The line was that we were fighting together to overthrow Nimeri, and when we have overthrown Nimeri, we shall come to power and solve our problems. The poor fellow went and was given assistance, and he worked hard, and when Nimeri collapsed, the multiparty system came into power: They ignored Garang. . . .

The same opposition against this government, that is, the National Democratic Alliance, who have now organized the neighboring groups, are now supporting the southern Sudanese, not because they like southern Sudanese, but because *they want to topple this government*. . . .

Is there slavery in Sudan?

I assumed the power of deputy speaker in the Assembly in July 1994, and I was given the job of the chairman of the Human Rights Committee, to investigate human rights in Sudan and report to the Assembly, without fear nor favor. This is what brings me to talk about slavery in Sudan. Slavery in the Sudan is a historical fact, just as you hear about slavery in West Africa—in Nigeria, Ghana. But when I came to assume my position as chairman of the committee, it so happened that the major problem was not slavery; the major problem was the world attacking Sudan for “human rights” violations, detention of politicians, and dealing with southern problems very badly. And so, I joined what they call EUACP [European Union-African-Caribbean and Pacific], a joint assembly.

I was elected to it to represent Sudan. I was able to invite a high-level delegation from the EUSAP joint assembly elected and sent to Sudan, under the chairmanship of Lord Plumb, House of Lords in Britain. He came to the Sudan; we visited the Nuba Mountains (where slavery is supposed to be practiced, so say Baroness Cox et al.). He was able to talk to anybody; He then rendered a report to the EUACP Joint Assembly in Brussels, and he said: “There is no such a thing as ghost house; if there was, it is no longer there now.” He said that the effort of Sudan toward constitutional development, good governance, and civil society—we had already set the date for this present election—that had taken place; he examined it and found it normal. We visited the areas under government control. He was able to go to the displaced areas; he was able to see the camps. It was a very good report; it was well circulated.

But the members of the British Parliament, Mr. Kinnock and this lady [Baroness Cox] ignored the report. . . . That was the time that I began to see the British interests. And after that we got a very bad report by Christian Solidarity International,

led by Cox, in which they accused the government of Sudan of slavery in the Nuba Mountains of southern Sudan; Islamization by force of the African tribes in the Nuba Mountains and other parts of the south; and that people were being mistreated in the government-controlled camps.

In the last week of February, I formed a committee in the Assembly, chaired by me, with two other members: Mr. Khalid, who is a well-known lawyer, an independent advocate in Khartoum; and a member of parliament, a colonel, Omar Hassan Sidiq. We went to the Nuba Mountains. We spent four days there. We visited churches, the prisons, the police stations, and we called a rally to announce ourselves, and the reasons for which we had come. And then we visited three far-flung, displaced areas, where people come from the SPLA to get food, to get clothes, to get agricultural instruments, and to be transported to where they would like to settle and farm. We went to three of those places—places where Cox claimed slavery was being practiced. We held meetings with these people, and we found that there was *none* of the things that Cox's report said: no slavery, no raping, no Islamization. The churches were there. I'm a Christian, I'm a Catholic. I went to the church and we prayed together in Protestant churches.

So when I returned to Khartoum, I held a press conference on that Sunday, which was before Ramadan holy day. I invited all the news agencies in Khartoum, including those from outside. I gave a full brief of my visit, and talked about the accusations coming from outside. Interestingly, BBC did not talk about it. Nobody challenged me. . . .

The real problem

There is no slave trade in Sudan, but there is a problem; some classify it under the term environmental deterioration. The Sudan is 1 million square miles, and we have the nomadic tribes in the north and in the south. These people own cattle, and they move from one place to another, following where there is water. And when they clash near this water, which is not enough, there is a terrible fight. These tribal fights were there during the British. It is extremely hard to control a tribal fight over a shortage of a resource such as water. So what the British administration used to do—and then when the government came to power it followed the same procedure—was to hold a tribal conference between one tribe and another in order to investigate what happened. These conferences were the only way of solving the problem. Through these fights, those who succeed, kidnap boys, animals, women, and take these things to their side as a part of looting. This is there up to now. It is what Baroness Cox reports back, that the Sudan government is encouraging slavery. When there is no civil war going on, the government is able to hold these tribal conferences and try to straighten things out. Part of the solution is to get some payment to people who have been badly mistreated; and the women and the children are returned, and then they come to settlement.

The only solution is to have agricultural settlement, and perhaps, to invite international assistance to Sudan so that you find a way of digging enough wells for these people, and make some regulations. But this government is not able to do this now because of the civil war.

Baroness Cox just went to the rebel areas. In the places under the control of the government, these things are not taking place at all, because wells are being dug for the people; grazing areas are being allocated for certain tribes, with the proper responsibility of those who are in charge—whether chiefs or headmen. But in the rebel area *where there is no government*, these things can take place and we don't know what is happening, and they can kill each other and take children.

This is what the illiterate, the uninformed misconstrue—Baroness Cox, of course, *she knows it!* There is no militia. These are the pastoralists; there are places where the government does not reach. . . . We know why they are behaving this way, but we don't have the money in order to develop, to start the necessary changes. We are incapacitated by civil war. The government is trying to have peace so that it can solve this problem. One of the problems to be solved is this. Agricultural development, animal husbandry, education to teach these people that it is better to keep your cattle in one place.

This is why the government is trying so hard to solve problems *with the rebels*. And I call upon all the people—we tried to discuss things with the rebels, and we met 14 times. We could not succeed because of two reasons: One, there are people whose interests depend on the rebels. One are the Sudanese opposition themselves, because without the rebels they will not come to power in Khartoum. And second, are the people—we have mentioned them—who would like to destroy Sudanese sovereignty.

Recently, we have decided to escape the television and to escape the news media, especially the foreign news media, and we went to the forest in order to discuss with our brothers. People are saying: "No, don't go to Nairobi; don't go to Kampala." The people, once they hear there is a meeting, they fly there to destroy it. So we have decided to make what is called "peace inside." We are still trying; there are people now trying to meet Garang. We have met two of the three leaders, and we have agreed with them, and the agreement that was made is the best agreement so far. We hope we shall meet Garang and his people as *Sudanese*. When these civilized nations, Britain, America, other people, come, they come with an interest. *We have nothing to pay you, why do you come?*

What is slavery? There are many people unemployed. These people are ready to work for nothing. If you go to Nairobi to visit, you'll see so many people without food; there are people ready to be slaves, but there is no market for slavery! I will leave my telephone number in the embassy. Anybody who would like to come and investigate slavery in the Sudan, please just ring me.