

Interview: James Mann



'Sudan's progress in recent years has been remarkable'

Debra Hanania Freeman interviewed former Congressman James Mann (D-S.C.) by phone last November, regarding his Sept. 13-23, 1996 visit to Sudan as part of a fact-finding delegation with the Schiller Institute.

EIR: I understand that from September 13th to Sept. 23rd, you went on a fact-finding tour of Sudan with some other elected officials. Now, I know that one of the things that you were told, prior to that visit, was that Sudan was a military dictatorship, probably one of the most dangerous countries in the world, for Americans to visit; and that the government is guilty of widespread human rights violations, ranging from forced conversions to Islam and persecution of Christians, to child abduction, genocide, and slavery. What were your impressions when you first arrived in Sudan?

Mann: My impressions were that that's ancient history. I think Sudan has made tremendous strides. I like to tell my friends, that as I moved around Sudan in various areas, including downtown markets and the like, I never got a hostile look—and, you can't walk down a main street in South Carolina without getting a hostile look from somebody. I was just astonished at the pleasant attitudes of all the people that we were in communication with. Of course, we didn't get out on the Ugandan border, where apparently John Garang and his forces still have some irritations, but, generally speaking—when I say *we*, I think our feeling was unanimous—we concluded that Sudan was making tremendous strides; they have a people's republic, a democracy that is more democratic than ours. One feature I liked about it, is that there are no political parties; but, they do have a wonderful political organization. They've divided themselves into 26 states; each state has its local assembly, or parliament. They have a National Assembly, which is kind of an ombudsmen's gathering; then they have National Parliament, with a Speaker of the House, and all that kind of business; and they have departments in government, dealing with all the various problems.

And I brought home with me a lot of literature, wherein they were attacking the problems of a society that, I would describe, is a growing one, which wants to be not-primitive. That's why they improve the technical education of their people, so they can meet the demands of a modern technology. They have tremendous agricultural potential, and they're

working on it. They have Experimental Stations working on the production of agriculture.

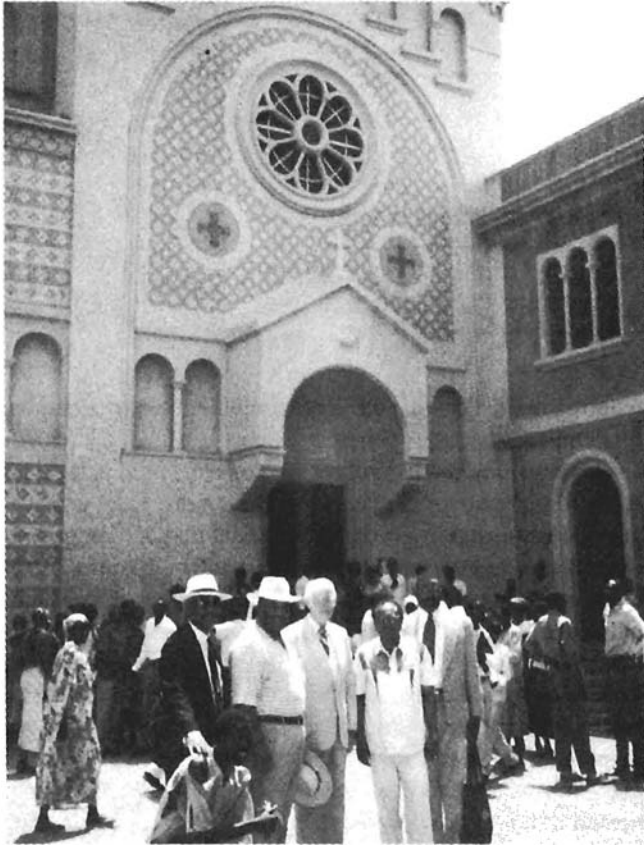
I was astonished to realize how important the Nile River is to a large part of the world. It's fantastic what effect it has on Sudan, and its potential: After all, they've got gravity irrigation, where, in my state, we'd have to spend a lot of money to buy a tractor and a big pipe, and all kinds of junk; but, they've got that gravity irrigation, which can cover millions of acres. And, they are beginning to organize their agricultural production, which includes really all of the crops that one might grow down South in the United States, but it includes a great cattle-raising potential, sheep, goats—and donkeys, of course. But it's hard for me to contain myself—that's how impressed I was about what they were doing.

And, only in the last few months they have published their goals and aims about improving their educational systems. Back in April, they reached an agreement with the primary rebellious crowd in the South: the FSIMA—Dr. Rick McCarthy—and then they went into an agreement which covers most of the opposition. There's still, apparently, some rebellion down along the borders. You know, when you're surrounded, when you have nine foreign countries bordering you, it's kind of easy to understand how you might have a little trouble on some borders, somewhere. But, John Garang, I think, is losing his influence; and, hopefully, he will go away soon.

But, the potential is what amazes me. You know, that the analysis was that, fully developed, Sudan agriculturally can feed the total of Africa, and the Middle East as well.

EIR: You also had the opportunity to visit an agricultural experiment that they're conducting, called the Gezira Scheme.

Mann: That's right. The fact that it's irrigated (all of us in the States who know what that means), that it's irrigated without limit, to whatever extent the particular crop requires, means that they're getting the maximum production. We pulled up peanuts and looked at them. We checked the sugarcane, and cotton, and other crops, and they're making the most of what they're experimenting with. If it can now be applied, spread out more throughout the countryside, it can be tremendous:



The Schiller Institute delegation outside the Catholic cathedral in Khartoum, in September 1996. From the left: Del. Ben Swan (Mass.); Ben McGee, Assistant Speaker Pro Tem of the Arkansas State Legislature; former U.S. Rep. James Mann (S.C.), and Alabama State Del. Thomas Jackson.

There was no indication that anybody was going hungry anyhow, but the potential is *just fantastic*.

EIR: Despite the fact that it's a poor country, it does seem that people have access to food.

Mann: That's right, and that situation has got to be improving, it oughtn't to do otherwise, now that the government is adequately organized, to maintain peace and to produce some of the education—a lot of education is required to do farming, too—for farming, and for developing technical education, to take advantage of the by-products of farming, which can be in various industries; and mining and oil, and things of that sort. They're undereducated, but they're *working on it*.

EIR: And, in this area around the Gezira Scheme, they are not only growing the food, but they also are engaged in some food-processing, and things like that.

Mann: Yes, they are, and that's part of their technological shortfall which can make a big difference, but they're making good strides in it. I don't know where they have been getting their advice, but they're making about as much progress as

one can imagine over a short period of time; and, it's bound to increase.

EIR: It's amazing to find an African country that's in the position to actually start exporting food.

Mann: Isn't it true? But, we did observe one problem: There are approximately 40,000 refugees from down South, that are in an encampment with huts and the like, just a few miles from Khartoum; but they are being fed, clothed, and receive medical treatment, from the central government.

EIR: You actually did get to visit that displaced persons camp?

Mann: Yes, and we talked to some of the leaders. Incidentally, a great many of them speak English. It's a carry-over from the English occupation. But we found very few situations where there wasn't somebody who would step up and speak English. In this case, we met in a little hut, with two or three leaders of the compound, and a couple of guys that had pretty good English. So, we were able to communicate very well. They were not totally satisfied with the medical care that they were getting, but, gracious, you find that out in the country around here.

EIR: One of the things that we are told, and, obviously, is a cause for great concern, was that there is religious persecution, because Sudan is identified as an Islamic republic. I'm assuming that most of the refugees in this camp were Christians. Is that true?

Mann: I am not aware that that was the reason for their being refugees. My information was that there was a rebellion, and they feared for their lives in the South, and I didn't detect in the refugee camp that they were primarily Christians.

I know, that in the general literature which I have read, that there is a governmental leaning toward Islam; however, the tolerance is remarkable. The first night we got there, we went to a Roman Catholic cathedral with a partially English service, and some of the others went to two or three other denominations.

EIR: So, as far as you were able to see, there is freedom of religion. People are free and able, if they're Christians, to participate in services of their own faith?

Mann: We didn't uncover *one* incident where anybody has been persecuted because they were a Christian.

EIR: Are Christians discriminated against in public office? Or, are they able to hold public office?

Mann: Well, we met with certain legislators, and there was a good sprinkling of them, and, we were told, that the National Parliament—we were told the numbers, and I don't remember them—but they were certainly not all Muslims. If my recollection serves me correctly, probably around 40% of them were non-Islamic, elected from all over the country.

EIR: Which is certainly different than the impression that we are given here.

Mann: Yes. When you look at what's going on in Afghanistan, and, if you try to compare that with Khartoum, then you might think that—but, there's *no comparison*. There was no indication that anybody had been coerced, pressured, or economically discriminated against: You know, we weren't there to fully analyze that problem, but what we saw, and what we read, and the services that we attended, and the groups that met with us, to talk about freedom and all that, were indicative of a substantial degree of tolerance.

EIR: When one hears about an "Islamic state," people immediately assume that women are not permitted to work outside the home, that they are not permitted to participate in the political process. Are women permitted in the National Assembly, for instance?

Mann: Absolutely, and I met with several women who were in the National Assembly, and some who were in the state assembly of Khartoum. And there are 26 states, and we met with a state legislators' group. As I recall, there was a woman who was the chairman, or the Speaker of that Khartoum group. And, what I saw in the paper this morning, where the [Afghan] Taliban make the women cover up their heads and all that—that does not exist in Khartoum. I didn't see a covered face. Not a one. They have these very thin little veils that hang off of one shoulder, but as far as binding up where you can't see anything but their eyes?—Oh, there might have been one out of every two or three hundred that was that way.

EIR: One of the most serious charges that's been raised against Sudan, and I know that it was one of the things that you gentlemen were specifically looking into in your mission there, is the charge that the government "systematically promotes and organizes the practice of slavery." Is there obvious evidence of slavery there?

Mann: Oh, absolutely not. I don't guess it's been fully analyzed as to where that accusation came from, but there's a suspicion that it came from down on the border somewhere adjoining Uganda, or Chad, or some other country. Part of our delegation went to the Nuba Mountains, where there's a claim there had been slavery. They went down and met with the leaders, and just couldn't detect any evidence on that, whatsoever.

So, there's a good many places in the world where you might find some kind of overbearing action going on, but we could not deduce, from what we saw, from what we heard, from what we investigated, and from where we went; certainly we *did* observe, it was not a governmental policy, nor that the government was tolerating it: It was not. I spoke of John Garang and other diehards down and around the southern border, that conceivably could have been involved to some extent. But, we certainly didn't develop that it was policy, or governmentally approved, or widespread for that matter.

EIR: One of the things that the U.S. Congress has been told, by some of the Christian leaders in the South who have visited the United States, is that, because of the fighting, that there has been a situation where people take hostages; but, that's significantly different from the practice of slavery. A prisoner of war is not quite the same as a slave.

Mann: Oh, sure. And, as I've indicated, I think that the peace agreements that have been reached with the *primary* dissidents has eliminated 99% of that.

EIR: It's starkly different from the story that most people have access to. Obviously, a retort that might come from someone who holds an opposing view, is that you were only allowed to see what they wanted you to see. Were you able to travel freely? Could you talk to whomever you wanted? Or was everything controlled?

Mann: Absolutely, it was *not* controlled. We determined where we wanted to go, and when; and we had the equivalent of a taxi-driver driving us, and he didn't try to influence us, so, we were *not* controlled. And, of course, we had the opportunity to talk to a great many natives, in various places. I'm going to repeat the statement I made earlier: That we didn't see anybody that appeared to be imprisoned; we didn't see anybody that appeared to be frightened; we didn't see anybody that appeared to be hostile—and I still go back to that word: You get hostile looks everywhere, but we didn't get any—they were a happy crowd. They have a good military, but the military's presence does not permeate the community.

EIR: So, there's not a big military presence in Khartoum?

Mann: Absolutely not. And the policemen are about as casual as any country I ever saw.

EIR: I know that some of the other members of the delegation have not really traveled extensively outside the U.S. Your tenure in the Congress was a long one. When you were there, you served on the Judiciary Committee; but, you also served on Armed Services?

Mann: No, I didn't; but, I traveled a lot with Armed Services. I have an extensive military background.

EIR: You have traveled extensively?

Mann: You would be hard put to identify any place I haven't been; but I did travel extensively, and, of course, just earlier this year, I went to Bosnia with a [Schiller Institute] group. And, I don't think I'm totally perceptive about what goes on when I'm only there for a few days, but, if there's anything serious, I would probably find out about it.

EIR: Have you ever traveled through a country under military dictatorship?

Mann: Yes. Zaire. And, also, Zambia; and Somalia. So, yes, I've been there.

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EIR: So, you recognize a military dictatorship when you see it?

Mann: Oh, yes.

EIR: Is the Sudanese population anti-American, or is the government anti-American?

Mann: No. Not only are they not anti-American, they have a large group with whom we met, "Friends of the United States." We met with them one evening, and they are reaching out to the world, understanding that their reputation needs some repair, and they are actively reaching out, which is a good sign.

EIR: There's a significant effort which is building, not only in the United States, but internationally, to impose sanctions on Sudan. There is a resolution which is currently before the Congress. . . . I don't expect you to be able, based on a ten-day tour, to know every detail of every aspect of the nation, but did you see any obvious benefit to be gained by imposing sanctions against this country?

Mann: No, I think it would be highly counterproductive; these people are *looking* for friends, and they are trying to be friendly. I understand that the United States' ambassador there recognizes their benign approach, and I think the reports that may have caused those movements *do not represent the actions of the government of Sudan*, or, the major business or religious leaders of Sudan. I just think they are incidents, perhaps. They have been blown up out of proportion.

EIR: So, then, your view is that Sudan does not consider the United States to be the "White Satan," but, actually wants to improve relations and expand relations.

Mann: You know, their attitude was more tolerant than we deserved. I was surprised when we were discussing with them, with the Speaker of the House, for example, which is a very powerful position. He very, very calmly dealt with the claims, and reasserted their interest in clearing up any such problems and having communicational relations with the United States and other countries. He was not as indignant, as I would have been in his position.

EIR: Do you think it would be worthwhile for some members of the U.S. Congress to travel over there?

Mann: Very much so.

EIR: Well, sir, I have to thank you for this: There are so few people in the United States, people in a policy-making position, who *have* had the opportunity to travel to Sudan. I think it's crucial to get this information out to people. Here in Baltimore, where I live, what most people know about Sudan, comes from the series that they read in the *Baltimore Sun*, which paints a picture of a terrible military dictatorship, where people can't walk the streets, where Christians can't go to church, and where the Christian population, in fact, is forced into slavery, and forced to convert to Islam—which is not a pretty picture.

Mann: No, it's not, and it's grossly overstated. You know, I heard two or three remarks which were trying to characterize Sudan: One of them was, that it could be the future United States of Africa, you know, which is a realistic statement, because of its potential for feeding the world, and for developing their technological capabilities.

EIR: It sounds like Sudan is certainly not a country without problems, but that the problems are typical of a young nation struggling to develop.

Mann: That's right. The progress they've made in the last four or five years is just remarkable. The popular government—we would call it a democratic government—I asked about the voting procedures. They keep the polls open about ten days, and they send the boxes up the rivers and through the jungles and everywhere, to reach everybody.

EIR: To get out into the bush?

Mann: That's right; they've got to go and find the people and give them the opportunity to vote, if they haven't. So, that is certainly not putting any roadblocks in the way of popular government.

EIR: Even the international observers who went over to observe the election, many of whom *were* hostile people, walked away and said that they thought the process itself was free and fair. I don't recall *any* allegations that it was a "mock" election.

Well, I thank you very much for this interview, and hopefully, we'll be able to expand this kind of fact-finding so that Americans can get an accurate picture, so we'll be able to shape our foreign policy on *fact*, not fiction.

Mann: I hope so, I'm doing whatever I can to help see to that.