

Mahmoud Ali Abu-Bakr Interview

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INTERVIEWER: Anton Lin



Mahmoud Ali Abu-Bakr

- ◇ General Director, African Centre for Human Rights
- ◇ Manager of the Peace Department, Brightness Centre of Tomorrow for Studies and Development
- ◇ Founded the Brightness Centre, an NGO, in 2019, to engage and inform Sudanese people regarding the new peace and to develop Darfur. It holds academic and government workshops to encourage dialogue.
- ◇ Born in Darfur, studied medicine in Egypt, a Masters in pathology from Edinburgh, worked in Libya and returned to Sudan in 2004 to work on human rights in Darfur.
- ◇ Darfurian, Bargo tribe

7 Questions

1. **When you hear the word “Sudan”, what first comes to mind?**
‘A big country with many resources. But crises and conflicts for 50 years have made us like this. We haven’t had good leaders, that’s our problem. It’s a management problem.’
2. **What is your message to the Sudanese people?**
‘You are all Sudanese, try to forget what happened before, and let’s start from the beginning, working for Sudan and the Sudanese. Work for our kids.’

3. **What is your message to the rest of the world?**
'To our neighbours and friends, let us rule our country by ourselves. We respect your boundaries and appreciate your support, but not your interference. Most of our resources go to you, but we need them.'
4. **How can the government earn the trust of the people?**
'The current system is good; it gives us a chance to improve relations between the civilians and military. We need each of them, and each must respect the importance of the other. My message to the FFC: please stop fighting between yourselves, work for Sudan. Solve the peace talks in Juba, without that, there is no Sudan.'
5. **What are you excited about in the next few years?**
'The Juba peace talks. And the fact that the old regime is gone, and we can now try to do something for ourselves.'
6. **What can Sudan and the international community learn from each other?**
'Sudan must learn from the international community how to make this revolution a success, so as not to repeat old mistakes. The world can learn from the fact that the Sudanese, despite so much suffering, have remained strong and full of hope.'
7. **What impact do you as an individual want to have?**
'I want to give a chance to the youth of our country, and to do that by educating them. I want to stop people thinking along tribal lines.'

PEOPLE

On truth and reconciliation:

'The main objective of the Brightness Centre, and also of the African Centre for Human Rights, is to determine what outcomes we need from transitional justice. Transitional justice brings peace, but most people misunderstand the meaning of the process. Development comes first, courts after. You have to begin with building the country, as that in itself helps secure peace. Look at Rwanda, and how it has developed economically in the last 15 years. While you develop, you keep the dialogue going about what happened in the past so that after the transitional period, the trials can begin.'

On prejudice:

'Hamdok and Hemeti have the same problem; they are not from Khartoum, so people don't like them. Hamdok is from Khordofan, Hemeti is from Darfur, and Nilotic elites like the FFC don't like this. Otherwise, wouldn't they complain more, or even sometimes, about al-Burhan? He's just as military. We need good relations between Hamdok and Hemeti.'

POLITICS

On the 2022 elections:

'I want a longer transition period, at least five years, otherwise this election won't change anything. We need development before an election- roads, industry, healthcare. We can't think about an election before that. All the current parties only represent the northern Sudanese from Bashir's era, just two million people.'

On the FFC:

‘The revolution was done by the Sudanese, but it has been hijacked by the FFC. They now control both the revolution and the narrative. The FFC has a lot of problems, especially with infighting amongst themselves.’

‘Most FFC members are Nilotic, some are from the old regime. As a result, they are making the peace talks in Juba difficult. It’s actually the military who are doing the best job at the peace talks.’

On the economy:

‘We have a very weak economy and the central bank is empty.’

‘Hamdok is doing good work and the international community is helping, but the FFC is making problems and some of our ministers are weak- they don’t have plans or roadmaps. The economy will only be fixed when the military and FFC start working together.’

‘You cannot stop the subsidies of food, fuel, and medicine, or the country will collapse.’

On political change:

‘I’d like to see the older generation of politicians- Sadiq al-Mahdi, the communists- retire and let the younger generation take control of politics.’

POWER

On Sudan’s security threats:

‘A strong deep state combined with weak ministers is our biggest threat. The deep state of the old regime still exists and is working hard.’

On balancing the role of the security forces in Sudan:

‘We need to see one team, military and civilian together. Unfortunately, our military is weak because the old regime neglected it in favour of NISS. We need to rebuild our military and one way to do that is to incorporate the soldiers from the armed rebel movements after the peace talks.’

‘During the transition period, the military needs a large role. After that, they should step back and focus on border security.’