Open Letter to United States (US) President Donald Trump, the Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and Members of the US Congress

29 November 2019

Dear Honourables,

We, the undersigned Sudanese intellectual, academic, civic, political and private sector actors, and members of civil society organizations write to urge the swift removal of Sudan from designation as a ‘state sponsor of terror’ (SSoT).

Sudan is at a crossroads: after extraordinary action by its people to topple the despotic and ideologically motivated regime of Omar Al Bashir there is finally an opportunity for the country to emerge from thirty years of conflict, oppression, economic mismanagement and isolation into a democratic era of peace and prosperity.

Support from the international community is vital if the people of Sudan are to succeed in dismantling the architecture of corruption and violence which kept the country in penury and division for so long. Your help for the swift removal of the US ‘state sponsor of terror’ (SSoT) designation is a critical precondition for this transformation.

The origins of the designation

As you know, the United States designated Sudan as a state sponsor of terrorism in 1993 and later imposed economic sanctions, declaring a US national emergency under the International Emergency Economic Powers Act. This state of emergency has been renewed annually since 1997, keeping Sudan in the spotlight in American policy.

The previous dictatorship of "Alingaz" Omar El Bashir did indeed have a long record of support for groups connected with international terrorism. The regime harbored many committed to an extreme vision of political Islam from around the world, providing passports to facilitate their movement and allowing them to establish training camps and education and economic infrastructure within Sudan, generating threats to regional and global peace and security. Considering Sudan’s deep rooted democratic tradition such travesties would have been impossible if unspeakable atrocities had not kept the people from expressing their objection.

Re-engagement

In 2015, however, the US administration formally entered negotiations aimed at normalizing relations with the Bashir regime. A new stage was reached in 2017, with the removal of economic and trade sanctions. Many in Sudan spoke out against this process at the time—including some of the signatories of this letter: they were concerned that enhanced relations with the United States would not encourage the regime to change its policies, but strengthen both it, and the forces of terror and conflict on which it fed. Indeed, little changed in the regime’s stance, whether in terms of repression and war at home or its support for destabilizing forces abroad.
A new beginning for Sudan

In the end, however, it was not pressure from outside, but the courageous actions of millions of Sudanese in peaceful street protests, that put an end to that dreadful saga, forcing the removal of Bashir in April 2019. After four arduous months of negotiation, a civilian government took their oath of office in August 2019 to represent and serve the true interests of the Sudanese people.

The new cabinet, led by renowned former international civil servant Prime Minister Abdullah Hamdouk, now faces a series of serious challenges, from turning around the economy, to negotiating peace, introducing democratic and human rights reforms, and dismantling the deep-rooted structures of corruption and exclusion. A range of destabilizing forces, including those allied with international terror with whom the old regime had a symbiotic ideological and financial relationship, are eager to undermine the new dispensation: they may represent an immediate existential risk to the Sudanese civilian transitional process.

Friends of Sudan have two options: the first is to sit back and watch the civilian government tackle this obstacle to stability alone. The second is to support them to challenge this dark legacy of the previous regime. One critical tool is lifting the SST designation. Removing the SST designation would have two key impacts.

First, it would allow Sudan’s new leaders to seek debt relief and open the door to increased international and regional investment and trade. This is vital to turning around Sudan’s plummeting economy. The rising price of food, medicine, and other basic commodities is putting huge pressure on the people, pressure which the supporters of the ousted regime are eager to manipulate.

Second, engagement with the mechanisms of the international banking system would strengthen the capacity of the new government to tackle corruption and terror and dismantle funding streams for criminal networks, bolstering internal efforts with international cooperation. Bashir turned Sudan into a safe haven for corruption, money laundering and facilitating transfers to terrorist groups, including as a consequence of US sanctions which pushed Sudan out of the international banking system. The lifting of sanctions in 2017 did little to correct this, primarily because there was no intention on the part of the regime to alter its own practice, but also because the international banking community was extremely wary of opening up to a regime which appeared to have done little to have merited a change in policy. This all changed with the April-December 2019 revolution: the world is now ready to re-engage formally once the way is cleared.

The people of Sudan should not be punished for the sins of the regime which caused them so much suffering and for which they sacrificed so much to remove.

The SST roadmap

Some have argued that little can be done quickly, that lifting the designation is a long process, including requiring the conduct of a six-month evaluation by the US State department. Over a year ago, however, the United States was already on the path to lifting the designation in the context of the old regime. In early November 2018 the State Department announced the roadmap for a review of the SSoT: expanded cooperation on counterterrorism, improved human rights protection including freedoms of religion and press, increased humanitarian access, cessation of fighting with rebels and work towards peace talks, and demonstration that the regime had ceased supporting terrorism.
The work of the Sudanese people to overthrow the Bashir regime has effectively achieved these targets.

A genuine cessation of hostilities and peace process is underway stewarded by the new transitional government and humanitarian access has been re-established. With champions of religious and media freedom in ministerial positions—some who served years in prison for their human rights activism under the old regime—the stance of the government on fundamental freedoms is unequivocal. The personal histories and ideologies of the Forces for Freedom and Change in Sudan and the new cabinet—in addition to the practice and policy changes which they have already instituted in their first few months of office—are clear evidence of their committed stand against radicalization and fundamentalism.

**Foreign policy**

Maintaining the SSoT designation is using a sledgehammer to crack a nut. A range of other measures, including targeted sanctions, can be taken against criminal networks that do not injure the people of Sudan and their transitional authority as a whole. Most critically, a strong civilian government and a supportive popular constituency are the best bulwarks against a resurgence of the forces of darkness and their supporting networks. The minority of skeptics in Sudan are only associating, perhaps unknowingly, with a minority clique of former regime supporters and day-dreamers of a comeback to their lost paradise. The overwhelming majority of Sudanese, however, have a conviction that the current course of peaceful change is irreversible. The SSoT designation puts an unjust economic and political burden on the shoulder on a government that is working in extraordinary conditions to establish democracy, peace, justice and stability in an exhausted country. We believe it is also against the US's own interests.

As former President Jimmy Carter has urged, “President Donald Trump's administration should work with Congress to remove Sudan from the SSoT list immediately and give democracy there a chance”.

Yours sincerely,

1. Abdalla Didan, Researcher, Peace and Conflict Resolution
2. Abdalla Musa, Initiative for East Sudan
3. Abdelrahman Elamin, Investigative Journalist- Kleptocracy
4. Abdu Mamoun Abdalla, Managing Director, Golden Arrow Company
5. Adil Samir Tawfik, Retired National Supreme Court Judge
6. Ahmed Abdalla Elsheikh, Head of Doctors Syndicate
7. Ahmed El Safie, PhD. Vice President, Ibn Siena University, Khartoum
8. Ahmed Rabee Sidahmed, Secretariat, Sudanese Professionals Association (SPA)
9. Altahir Badreldin, Researcher
10. Amir Osman, Africa policy Analyst
11. Amjad Farid, Politician
12. Amr Mohamed Abass, Public Health Advisor and Writer
13. Anis G Haggar, Chairman, Haggar Group
14. Anwar Elhaj, Executive Director, Sudan Democracy First Group
15. Asha Khalil Al Karib, PhD. Strategic Advisor of Sudanese Organization for Research and Development
16. Asma Ismail, Researcher
17. Azza Mustafa, PhD. Freelance Researcher
18. El Amin Mohamed Osman, Visual artist
19. El Mahboub Abdel Salam, Solidarity Movement for Democracy and Social Justice
20. El Sadig Ali Hassan, Secretary General, Darfur Bar Association
21. Guma Kunda Komey, PhD, Academic and Civic Activist
22. Hadia Hasaballa, Lecture, Ahfad University for Women
23. Hala Babiker Elnour, Former Diplomat
24. Hala Yasin Elkarib, Director of Strategic Initiative for Women in the Horn of Africa
25. Hassan Abdel Atie, PhD. Chairperson, National Civic Forum
26. Hisham Omer Elnour, PhD. Elnilain University
27. Huda Babiker, medical doctor
28. Ibrahim Taha Ayoub, Former Foreign Affair Minister and Member of Forces of Freedom and Change FFC
29. Ismail El Tag, Spokesperson, Sudanese Professional Association, former Judge
30. Kamal El Gezuli, Lawyer and Writer
31. Khalid Eltigani Elnour, Editor-in-Chief, ELAFF newspaper
32. Khalid Omer Yousif, Secretary General, Sudan Congress Party and Leader, Forces of Freedom and Change FFC
34. Magdi El Gezouli, PhD. Writer
35. Mariam Alsadig Almahadi, Vice President of Umma National Party, Deputy of Secretary General- Sudan Call and Leader, Forces of Freedom and Change FFC
36. Mohamed Farouk Salman, Vice President, Sudan Alliance Party and Leader, Forces of Freedom and Change FFC
37. Mohamed Jalal Hashim, PhD. Writer
38. Mohayed Siddig, Member, Central Council of Forces of Freedom and Change
39. Moiez Hadra, Lawyer
40. Monim El Jak, Political Anthropologist.
41. Mossaad Mohamed Ali, Director, African Centre for Justice and Peace Studies
42. Muawia Hamid Shadad, PhD. Chairperson, Human Rights and Legal Aid Network
43. Mubarak Ardol, Political Activist
44. Muntaser Ibrahim, Academician, member of Faculty and Teaching Staff Initiative of University of Khartoum.
45. Munzoul Assal Manzoul, PhD. Sudan Social Development Organization SUDO
46. Mutaaal Girshab, PhD. Director, Regional Centre for Training and Development of Civil Society
47. Muwaia Hamid Shaddad, Chair, Human Rights and Legal Aid Network
48. Noureldien Salaheldien Mohamed, Political Secretary of the Sudanese Congress Party
49. Omnia Youssif Abu Fidaya, Sudanese Centre for Human Rights and Media Freedom
50. Osama Daoud Abdel Latif, Chairman, DAL Group
51. Osman Margani, Editor-in-Chief, Al Tayar Daily Newspaper
52. Rifaat Makkawi, Lawyer and Director of People Legal Aid Centre PLACE
53. Salah El Amin, Businessman
54. Salaheldin Mohamed Ali Haroun, Senior Consultant Psychiatrist
55. Salih Saeed Salih Saeed, Lawyer, Member of Sudan Democratic Alliance of Lawyers
56. Sami Abdelhalim Saeed, PhD. Lawyer
57. Samia El Hadi Elnagar, PhD. Development Advisor
58. Samia El Hashmi, Advocate
59. Sara Ibrahim Abdeljalail, President, Sudan Doctors Union- UK
60. Sawsan El Sheewaia, Asmaa for women rights
62. Shaikh Ahmed Eltayeb Zeinalabdein, Theology scholar and community leader
63. Shamsaddin Dawalbait, Director, Democratic Thought Project and Editor-in-Chief, Alhadatha Daily Newspaper
64. Siddig Abdawahd Ahmed, Private Sector, Alil for Road and Bridges
65. Siddig Umbadda, PhD. Economist, Retired University Professor
66. Tarig Ahmed Khalid, PhD. Writer and Lecture, University of Khartoum
67. Ubai Kamal, Researcher
68. Wagdi Kamel, PhD. Academician and Film Maker
69. Yasir Shiekheldin Abdalla, Future Makers Organization
70. Yousif Ahmed El Tinay, CEO, United Bank
71. Zuheir Saeed, PhD. President, Sudan Archaeology Society

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