
Interview with Jan Pronk, UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General in the Sudan

His Excellency Jan Pronk was appointed United Nations Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) in the Sudan with effect from June 18, 2004. As head of the United Nations Mission in the Sudan (UNMIS), he is responsible for coordinating all activities of the UN system in the Sudan. UNMIS is mandated by Security Council Resolution 1590 to monitor and support the implementation of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), which was signed by the Government of the Sudan and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SLPM/A) on January 9, 2005. UNMIS is also tasked with providing political and logistical support to the African Union in Darfur.

Mr. Pronk has spent many years of his career in public service, both in his native the Netherlands and as a senior UN official. Prior to his appointment as SRSG, Mr. Pronk taught at the Institute of Social Studies in The Hague, the Netherlands, as a Professor in Theory and Practice of International Development.

He spoke from Khartoum to The Forum's Cornelia Schneider and Lyn Debevoise on November 21, 2005.

FORUM: *Mr. Pronk, UNMIS' mandate is mostly concerned with the implementation of the CPA and not so much with Darfur, as many people think. Yet UNMIS is clearly engaged in other activities such as good offices and human rights monitoring. Are you worried that UNMIS is being spread too thin? Is it really possible for one mission and you, one SRSG, to cover two such enormous tasks as CPA implementation and Darfur?*

PRONK: I don't think we will be spread too thin. The important issue is that we should be able to have an integrated approach toward all the aspects of the conflict. And the conflict is extremely complex in the Sudan.

It's economic, it's political, it's cultural, it's tribal, it's a resources conflict with many dimensions, and you have to have a mandate of a UN peacekeeping force. You have to be holistic.

That requires a mission that does not only consist of military observers, but also of people who can assist and coordinate in other fields, including economic reconstruction and development, humanitarian assistance, and monitoring human rights violations—all aspects that may lead

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to new or renewed conflict. And then there's a territorial dimension. You cannot have peace in the country as a whole if there is still a war in Darfur. Peace is indivisible. You cannot afford to focus on only a part of the problem. That is why being engaged in Darfur politically, humanitarian-wise, and perhaps

at certain moments also in terms of peacekeeping, is essential.

FORUM: *So given some of these tasks that you've just listed, where would you say your priorities lie? Regional issues and various tasks such as ceasefire monitoring, return of refugees, demining assistance, promoting human rights—can you really deal with all of these in a holistic approach, or do you have to set priorities somewhere?*

PRONK: We have to deal with all of these issues at the same time. Priorities may have to be determined on the basis of available resources, which may, for instance, limit the number of sites and offices that we establish in the field. At the moment we are not spread thinly; we have established about 12 offices throughout the country in order not to engage only from the capitals in the north and the south. We want to be as close as possible to the rather differentiated conflicts throughout the country as a whole. If the resources are not adequate, for instance in terms of staffing or in financial terms, we would diminish the number of offices rather than no longer deal with reconstruction, DDR [disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration], or human rights issues. That would result in a rather skewed approach and would run the risk of conflict potentials not being addressed.

FORUM: *Yet of an authorized contingent of some 10,000 peacekeepers, I understand that thus far only some 3,000 of those are on the ground. Could you address what is holding up this deployment and what the consequences of such a delay are?*

PRONK: At the moment there are about 4,000, which is 40 percent, and that is far below what we need to have, and for several reasons. The first reason was that the SPLM, the southern party, did not allow us to prepare for the coming of these forces until there was a peace agreement and until the Security Council had given us a mandate. Although we had had an advance mission since June 2004 [UNAMIS, the UN Advance Mission in the Sudan], we got the mandate [for UNMIS] only in March 2005, which explains, I would say, more than half a year of the delay. Second, as soon as we got the mandate and the license from the SPLM to get into the south Sudan, the rainy season started, which made it difficult to prepare for the coming of the troops. And the third main problem is the following: we have 10,000 troops from a number of different countries—the seven most important at the moment are India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Egypt, Kenya, and Zambia. But all these countries are dependent on each other. If one country fails to meet a deadline in bringing, for instance, helicopters, medical [staff], or engineers—just three examples—others then meet a bottleneck, and they can't [deploy], which has a snowball effect.

We now plan to be at full capacity by early February [2006], but I must admit, due to constant new bottlenecks, we're sliding backwards. So far this has not created any problem on the ground, but it may in the future when we have to send out all these UNMOs [UN Military Observers] throughout the country and protect them.

FORUM: *As you said, the top troop contributors have been developing countries. Why have there been so few force contributions by developed countries? Is it fair to say that the developed countries are avoiding their responsibility toward peacekeeping?*

PRONK: Yes, that's correct. The present policy in the Security Council is to request that particular developing countries do the job in their own region. It can be said, of course, that it is an African conflict, so that's why Western countries want the African countries and also other developing countries to be present. But—and that is understandable politically—behind it, of course, is also a fear among Western countries that their soldiers will be put at risk. And they rather prefer the soldiers from African and Asian countries to be put at risk, which is not, in my view, totally legitimate. But that is the political fact at the moment. The bulk of the finance of these troops is provided for by contributions coming from Western countries. I hope, anyway, that for our operations, which consist of 750

[UNMOs] observers within the 10,000 military [contingent], we will get many more observers from Western countries—these are the eyes and ears, of course, of the mission, spearheads—so that [at least] the observing of

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the ceasefire implied in the peace agreement will be global and not only done by people from the region itself.

FORUM: *What do you see as the most important lessons from the UN experience in the Sudan?*

PRONK: First, a Chapter VI operation with the consent of the parties is always better than a Chapter VII operation because then you can really use all your other offices, the political offices and the developmental offices, rather than only coming in with military force. Two, be as holistic as possible. Don't resort only to observation—that's never enough. Third, if you deal with many different issues in such a holistic, integrated approach, then don't come in with a mission completely separate from the UN approach. Base the presence of the UN in a traditional fashion, by incorporating all the United Nations agencies in one overall unified approach, under one line of command, in order really to avoid waste, duplication, and internal conflict among United Nations agencies. Four, plan for longer periods. For such missions, one or two years is a non-starter. This mission has a longer-term horizon related to the duration of the period until the referendum, which is six years [from 2005]. Our mandate will be six years plus something. Even that is short because conflict management, conflict moderation, really requires about a decade, I would say. And that also means a fifth lesson: it is necessary to have longer-term finance secured for such an operation. There are more, but these are five [lessons].

FORUM: *Talking about the long-term nature of the mission, do you share sentiments that the south Sudan secession from the north by the year 2011 is inevitable, and if so, how do you feel this would affect the implementation of the CPA, especially given that one of its underlying principles is the emphasis on "making unity attractive?"*

PRONK: It is not inevitable; the decision to stay together or to separate has been postponed until the referendum in six years, and our mandate is to make unity attractive. Our hope is that the outcome is such that the

country will remain whole. At the same time, we will respect and guarantee, of course, implementation of the outcome of the referendum if it results in separation. In my view, people will vote for unity if three conditions are met. First, if there's more peace than before the peace agreement was signed. Less war, less violent conflict, then we can help them to reach a situation of more sustainable peace in six years' time. Second, if the rights for all the minority groups, tribes, regions, and women are being guaranteed—which has not been the case for the 40 to 50 years of independence of the Sudan. And third, if there is less poverty than before—if indeed the expectations of the people are that peace will benefit them also, and not only the elite, the middle class. . . .

FORUM: *Many people thought that the death of Vice-President John Garang in July 2005 would mark the beginning of the end of the peace agreement. Perhaps remarkably the government and the SPLM actually seem to be working together in this phase. Could you say what your assessment of the situation is—how well is Salva Kiir doing as Garang's successor, and how are they working together?*

PRONK: Of course it was a great shock. It did lead to some delay in the implementation of the arrangements, but not too much. Since then, the Government of National Unity has been formed, not only the presidency—which had already been [formed] in July—but also the government of the south. The constitutions for the [whole] country and for the south have also been accepted. So that's quite good. In the meantime, a number of institutions have been established on the basis of the CPA. For instance, the Assessment and Evaluation Commission, the CJMC [Ceasefire Joint Military Committee], the [National Petroleum] Commission are all going well. Of course, there is no full conference between the parties. Definitely not. But that is to be understood—after decades of war, there are sometimes differentiated views within the government and within the government of the south. It's a matter of confidence-building.

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President Salva Kiir of the south [used to be] more a military person than a politician, so he brings with him some new people, new understanding, and a new approach. He's somebody who listens to others and who is quite willing to bring the so-called other armed groups, which are not a part of SPLM, on board. And that is a fresh approach, which is

useful. So while we are worried about a slowing down, we are not worried about the direction. Both parties are still committed to the same objective.

FORUM: *For peace to succeed, the SPLM will need to undergo a transformation from a guerrilla army, effectively, to a democratic government and civilian administration. Do you believe—you touched on this just now—that this process of transformation is on track, and where are the greatest challenges ahead of us in this respect?*

PRONK: It will take years and years to become a government, compared with the ANC [African National Congress in South Africa]—and moreover, you have to become a political movement. You have to represent the people and also rule a territory, which is difficult. What are you becoming? Do you become democratic or do you become authoritarian? These are major challenges.

In addition to this, the SPLM is not the only force in the south. You have other movements: the SSDF [South Sudan Defense Forces] is an umbrella of a number of other movements challenging the SPLM. And [these other groups] have a military force comparable with that of the SPLM, so it will take years of capacity-building and confidence-building within the country. And you have all the risks of an elite that is not being contained very easily with traditional democratic procedures and which can easily make mistakes. In addition to this, theirs is a government that hardly has a staff. Sure, it sounds pathetic, but there are ministers without ministries. So you have to be patient. As long as things go in the right direction, it doesn't matter.

FORUM: *Regarding these other armed groups in the south that you just mentioned, many of them were not a party to the CPA, and one way of approaching this is by means of the South-South Dialogue that aims to bring them into the peace process by merging them with the SPLM. So far, no agreement has been reached on this. Are you, as SRSG, worried that some of these groups may become spoilers to the peace agreement—and if so, how do you think UN peacekeepers should respond?*

PRONK: Some can, indeed, become spoilers. The SSDF is talking at the moment. The question is, will the leadership of the SSDF, and particularly Paulino Matip [Commander-in-Chief of the SSDF], be able to keep his grip on his own combatants as the process takes time?

One example, the Lord's Resistance Army [LRA], based in Uganda, is quite strong now in the south of the Sudan, and they're getting stronger

because they're no longer purely Ugandan. They've got a Sudanese base, comprised of people who are not in agreement with the present course of action. Now, in such a case it may be possible that such groups not only turn against the SPLM but also turn against the international community, including the military observers, and that means that security and protection are quite high priorities on our list of action.

FORUM: *You're presumably referring to the killings of some international aid workers in recent weeks in the south?*

PRONK: Correct, the LRA killed two deminers and a humanitarian person. Moreover, they killed a couple of dozen civilians in villages. The threat by the LRA both to the locals and to the expats has increased a lot since the ICC [International Criminal Court] published the indictments against the leadership of the LRA. We have to live with it; we have to protect ourselves. I hope it will not result in paralyzing our peacekeeping operation.

FORUM: *And will UNMIS help with the arrest of suspects if they turn out to be hiding in the south of the Sudan?*

PRONK: That's not our mandate. We have to protect ourselves against attacks by the LRA, but we do not have the mandate to chase them or arrest them. We are meeting them in the field, but their attacks are always guerilla, no strong engagements with the UN. A [confrontation] may take place in the future; we are now cooperating with the SPLM and also with the Sudanese armed forces, in particular to help demine essential roads so that the United Nations troops can come in with

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heavy equipment. That is not possible at the moment in the south because the roads are not yet clear. Because we are not yet on the ground in adequate numbers, we want to get protection for our deminers from the Sudanese armed forces and from the SPLM. Discussions so far do lead in that direction.

FORUM: *Has the Government of National Unity indicated whether they would arrest LRA leaders indicted by the ICC, or would they rely on Ugandan forces to do so?*

PRONK: They want to do it together. At the same time, we see that the SPLM and also the Government of National Unity desire to find a political

solution. That's not easy because you cannot make a political deal with the leaders of a movement when these leaders themselves have been indicted by the ICC, because all countries who have ratified the ICC treaty have the obligation to arrest them. The UN does not have that obligation; if we meet them, we have to protect ourselves. And we hope that it will be possible to bring some reason into the heads of the people who have not been indicted, so that they distance themselves from the [five] leaders and understand that amnesty is possible for them, as well as demobilization, disarmament, and reintegration into a society, whether that be Sudanese or Ugandan.

FORUM: *Darfur is another situation that the ICC is beginning to investigate. In your view, what role will this investigation in Darfur play in advancing peace in the region, if any?*

PRONK: [The ICC] will pay a visit to the Sudan for the first time this week. So far they have carried out their investigations outside the country. I hope and foresee that the government will cooperate with them. They need to investigate a number of cases; I don't know which ones because names were given to the ICC in a closed envelope by the Commission of Inquiry [led by Antonio] Cassese. It is important to keep up the threat because the perpetrators got away much too easily. Without an effective threat, it will not be possible to exert enough pressure on the government to make peace.

FORUM: *Does this indicate a change of attitude on the part of the Government of National Unity toward the ICC?*

PRONK: That's not what I said. I was not speaking on behalf of countries. I was presenting my own view that the ICC is necessary and can be an effective device. Is there a change in attitudes among countries? I don't know; I haven't noticed that so far. You all know the United States was not in favor [of the ICC], but it abstained [from the vote of the Security Council on referring the situation in Darfur to the ICC], which was good in order to show the international community that there is no division among the countries. I implicitly was a little bit critical about the decision of the ICC to indict [Joseph] Kony and the other leaders of the LRA without consultation with us, because it does have two consequences: these people are now attacking us, which was not the case before, and you are removing political space in order to find a political solution. But that's the division of tasks between the United Nations and the ICC. I was not critical of the ICC as far as Darfur is concerned. They had to be brought on board. They take their time, but I have no doubt that they can come forward with well-documented cases.

FORUM: *Regarding other initiatives focused on Darfur: in Abuja in July, the government and two of the rebel groups signed a declaration of principles. But at the same time, the security situation in Darfur has been worsening over the last couple of weeks. The Abuja talks are now going into the seventh round without much sign of progress, and the Sudanese Liberation Army, SLA, is divided into two warring factions. Given all of this, do you feel that peace and reconciliation is still possible in Darfur?*

PRONK: You mean a framework agreement between the government and the [SLA] and the JEM [Justice and Equality Movement] rather than a comprehensive peace agreement, like in the north/south conflict? Such a framework agreement is still possible. Whether it is politically possible is [hard to say,] because it will be difficult to get all the players to the table, even though the

[Abuja] talks so far were not unsuccessful. The fifth round did indeed—as you mentioned—[conclude in] the declaration of principles. The sixth [round] was not negative because they really talked about substantive issues, and people did stay at the table and did not run away. It was difficult, but okay. The seventh will start on the 28th of November, but between the sixth and seventh [rounds] a major new problem arose, and that was a perhaps irreparable split between the two major leaders of the [SLA]: Abdul Wahid, representing more the Fur Tribe in the south of Darfur, and Minni Minnawi, representing a little bit more the Zaghawa tribe in the north. The split isn't purely tribal, but it is a jockeying for power between leaders. This has consequences, also, for the Abuja talks. I don't think it's possible anymore to bring these people together—but we have to try to create a situation whereby they do not exclude each other and pose as the only party that can represent the [SLA] as a movement. That would be detrimental to the possibility [of reaching] an agreement signed by everybody who has some power in the field. But I think it's possible. Wise, skilled negotiators and facilitators are necessary in order to bring these people to the table, to keep them at the table, and to find a kind of consensus along those lines.

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FORUM: *Currently the talks are being mediated by the African Union; the UN are just observers. Should the UN take on a bigger role?*

PRONK: Well, the decision has been made by the Security Council, and the Security Council accepts the African Union as the main facilitator, and that's the way it is. We shouldn't try to change horses during the race. And the AU has the advantage of also having the troops on the ground—also at the request of the Security Council. They'll do it in an integrated fashion, politically as well as militarily. We are working very closely with the African Union to get support from the international community to finance the troops. We facilitate also—or cofacilitate—the workings of the mediator, Mr. [Salim Ahmed] Salim, who by the way is a very experienced international negotiator and the former minister of foreign affairs of Tanzania, the former executive secretary of the African Union, and a presidential candidate in Tanzania in the past, so it's not necessary to bring others in.

FORUM: *But at the same time, there's been a number of reports suggesting that African Union forces are unable to control the situation in Darfur. Given this, will the UN take over operations in Darfur at some stage in the future?*

PRONK: Well, they can't control it because they are not big enough, and if the UN were as big as they are at the moment, we couldn't either, no? You need more people. All the African forces whom I meet in the field are quite dedicated and also quite skilled.

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The African soldiers and commanders are good and sometimes even better than Westerners because they know the situation and how to talk with the parties, making it easier to reconcile [differences]. And if you think that you can come in with a strong force from outside just using force and heavy equipment, then you are mistaken. You cannot enforce peace from outside on this nation, which has been ridden by

violence for centuries. You have to talk and talk and mediate and reconcile and address the root causes of the conflict. That requires much more than the use of force—that is to say, an integrated approach. That [integrated approach] is not something the African Union can do, that is what we can do.

But you have to bring in a bigger force, not just to keep the fighting parties away from each other, because the ceasefire more or less is being kept, but to disarm the Janjaweed, stop the Arab militia, and safeguard the villages, where people have to return to after a peace agreement, which may lead to the start of the return of all IDPs [internally displaced persons] from the camps. That is why you need troops, not to fight, but to protect by a physically really visual and deterrent presence.

FORUM: *So does that mean there is a role for the UN in Darfur—a bigger role than they play at the moment?*

PRONK: If the African Union continues to be dependent on pledges by other countries on a three-month basis, it can't work because peacekeeping operations take years, and you have to plan ahead. And if the African Union cannot bring more than 7,000 [troops], then it is not enough. I assume that after the peace agreement is reached, the international community and the Security Council—together, by the way, with the African Peace and Security Council—will reconsider the present security arrangements, and that may imply a greater role for the UN. But that's not for me to decide, that's for the Security Council, that's for New York.

A reconsideration of present security arrangements in Darfur may imply a greater role for the UN.

FORUM: *In an article in this edition of The Forum, Professor O'Fahey points to the relatively short history of Darfur within the modern Sudan and wonders whether Darfur's future lies within or merely with the Sudan. Do you have any views—where do you see Darfur's future?*

PRONK: I would question whether the history of Darfur is so short. Darfur has been a power—internally divided, of course—in the history of the Sudan for centuries. And to a certain extent, this is also a conflict between Darfur and the other part of the northern Sudan. After an agreement on the devolution of powers that will lead to decentralization (I don't want to use the word “autonomy”), I hope it will be possible to have a Sudan with a great deal of delegation and differentiation within one state. The Sudan is the biggest country in Africa, bordering nine different countries. Keep it one state.

The Sudan can learn from many other countries, both in Africa as well as in Western countries: stay one state. My mandate is to make unity

the attractive option because as soon as you get separation, there are two problems: first, not everybody will accept separation. Second, as soon as you get separation in this country, other groups in other countries see that as a precedent and may call for more ambitious objectives with respect to their own country, and then you get insecurity elsewhere. And third, as soon as you get separation, you get more minorities within each of the new states, which is a new source of conflict. For all these reasons, the Security

Unity is the attractive option. We can't impose it, we do not want to impose it, we will not preach it, either.

Council and the African Peace and Security Council have said that the internal conflict in the Sudan is a threat to regional security—thus, to African security, and thus, to international security. That is why the international community has said that unity is the attractive option. We can't impose it, we do not want to impose it, we will not

preach it, either. We will make it possible. We will help the Sudanese to make it possible. That applies to Darfur in relation to the rest of the country. And also to the south in relation to the north.

FORUM: *Talking about regional security, how do you feel rising tensions between Ethiopia and Eritrea over their disputed border may affect or have affected your mission in the Sudan, especially in the east?*

PRONK: [I am] very worried, and I hope that these two countries will not return to war because they had a major war in the sixties and the seventies—until the eighties. Then they had a major short war from 1998 [to 2002] that led to so many casualties. It was such a setback to the development of both countries, and it should not be repeated. In addition to this, it will have a spreading effect in the Sudan. In the east in particular: more refugees; the possible forces from both countries who will use the Sudan as a theater. So for these two reasons, I think it's very important that our efforts in both respects [are] to solve the border conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea and the domestic conflict between the Eastern Front and Khartoum peacefully.

FORUM: *Is there a regional approach to problems such as this among the various UN missions in Eastern Africa?*

PRONK: I must confess that that was not very well developed. As a matter of fact, I started a number of initiatives. Last month, we started contacts with

MONUC, the UN Mission in Congo, in order to coordinate our activities, for instance, with regard to the LRA. We also run joint operations. We had yesterday for the first time a rather intense discussion with UNMEE [the UN Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea], in Eritrea, in order to coordinate our information and balance activities with regard to a number of cross-border problems within the Sudan and Eritrea. And I've now also invited the UN in Chad to come at the beginning of December to discuss quite a number of spillover effects from the Sudanese conflict into Chad and from the Chadian internal conflict into the western Sudan. The peacekeeping operations in the past have been seen too much as within a country when they have a regional dimension—the peace operations must work together.

FORUM: *The eastern Sudan has the potential to turn into another Darfur—the Beja and the Raschaida tribes are two of the groups who have complained about economic marginalization and cultural suppression for a long time. . . .*

PRONK: You are quite right, marginalization and neglect are some of the root causes of the violent conflict—throughout the country as a whole, as well as in the east. It cannot be solved from outside, definitely not. This is a domestic conflict that will take decades or longer to be resolved. The important factors, as I said before, are to aim for more peace, more rights, and less poverty. Less poverty, in particular, to give people the feeling that there is prospect for improvement. It is also necessary to address political marginalization—that includes the rights issue—which is why we have that unified, holistic approach.

This, of course, requires that the government spend its own resources in a fair manner toward poverty reduction and regional development [and toward] transparency and good economic governance policy instruments. The UN made the proposal to get a consortium, whereby the international community, led by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, are giving support to a country on the condition that that country carries out a good developmental governance policy: transparency, no corruption, a policy to address poverty—which, in a modern jargon, means to help the country reach the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). There is cooperation against marginalization—which is possible to achieve. It is very tough, however, because the elite in this country has

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never had much interest in poverty reduction. That requires a lot of international pressure and guidance.

FORUM: *Over the next couple of months, hundreds of thousands of refugees are set to return from neighboring countries and the Sudan itself to a southern Sudan that lacks infrastructure and health and educational facilities. How will the Sudan cope? And is UNMIS ready to assist?*

PRONK: No, we are not ready. We want to assist, but we are very much dependent on international resources. It is not part of the official budget of the mission, so we are banging around in the world to finance our plans. The plan for next year is for about 600,000 refugees to return, which is a huge number, but a small fraction of the total number of millions of refugees. They cannot all return at the same time because the situation is very fragile in the field. Returnees will have to compete with the local population, who never left, for access to water and land, for instance, and that may lead to more conflict. Returns are a conflict-ridden issue in the years ahead. We

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need an approach whereby we in the field can help manage the conflict, *and* we need the resources to improve education, access to water, access to land, employment creation, food security, and so on.

For this year, our humanitarian appeal was addressed with pledges of up to about two-thirds of what was necessary. For next year, we'd rather [funds] go into reconstruction and return [assistance]. If we don't get the resources, it will be a major problem. The international community has to understand that starting this peacekeeping mission and

not continuing it with resources to meet the consequences of the peace and to address possible root causes of a renewal of the conflict would be a bad approach. They said A, they have to say B, C, D—the whole alphabet.

FORUM: *Who in particular are you addressing those pledges for financial assistance to? Who will be paying for this?*

PRONK: The government itself has to do a lot, much more than in the past, because it has been very elitist and there [will be] a lot of money in the future on the basis of oil resources. That requires a huge change in the

allocation of domestic resources, [which will be] difficult to accomplish because the middle class will be lured into just helping itself. We need to make resources available on the basis of oil income for the poor. Second, the international community, for instance Europe, [has played a role] for many years.

The interesting thing is that the promise by the government has been, in the Oslo Conference, to finance two-thirds out of its own resources. That was a surprise. Post-conflict Afghanistan, for instance, financed only a small amount of money themselves. Of course the Sudan is [in] a different position, [but] I hope they did not just portray a figure to which they are going to pay lip service. If they don't do what they promise, the international community will hold them accountable. Then funds will not be made available because taxpayers in the United States and in Europe will say "if the Sudanese are not helping their own people, we cannot help [either]." So, [these two are] dependent on each other. That will require a lot of economic diplomacy in the years ahead.

An unholy alliance between foreign economic interests and the elite would lead to a greater divide in economic terms, [which might] result in violence in the cities themselves.

FORUM: *What does this say about international business and investment in the Sudan. Good thing—or bad thing?*

PRONK: International business is coming to Khartoum at the moment; it's a booming city. It is positive in terms of employment creation; it is negative in terms of resources [being made available] only for those people who already live on the positive side of the poverty line. International business that is not investing in the poor parts of the country is not helping to reach a more equal socioeconomic development in the country. It is very important that there is no, say, unholy alliance between foreign economic interests and the elite in this country, which would lead to a greater divide in economic terms than ever before. It would also be a stupidity because it would undoubtedly result in resentment and maybe violence—not only far away from Khartoum, as has always been the case, in Darfur or in the south, but also in the cities themselves. We have seen that happening for the first time in August [following the death of Vice-President John Garang]; if things are going to be repeated because people are resenting

inequality and no longer accepting it like they did in the past, then the Sudan will be in for a very difficult period.

FORUM: *Given the events over this last year, are you more or less optimistic than a year ago about the prospects for peace in the Sudan?*

PRONK: Optimism is a concept that I do not want to use. The UN and the international community are not watching a theatre from the sideline; we are *participating* in the process. So we are not *looking to* the process, [declaring] ourselves positive or negative, optimistic or pessimistic about the outcome; we have the obligation, the duty, the mandate to steer the process into a desirable direction. That desirable direction, again, is peace, it is meeting the MDGs, it is justice—and [such an outcome is] possible. If we fail, it would be 50 percent the responsibility of the international community itself. You have to fight for it and that is what we are doing at the moment.

FORUM: *Dank U Wel, Mr. Pronk!*

Note from the editor: Out of deference to the preferences of certain authors contributing to this special feature on the Sudan and to the Arabic original of the country's name, The Forum will refer to the country as "the Sudan" throughout this section.