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## How to keep peace alive

By Jemma Kumba | July 13, 2006

THE SUDANESE government and Sudan Liberation Army factional leader Minni Arcua Minnawi recently signed a peace agreement to end three years of violence in Darfur. Having participated in the peace negotiations to end the 21-year war between North and South Sudan, I was encouraged by this hopeful step in Darfur. However, in order to maintain peace, the international community must remain actively involved to help ensure implementation of this agreement.

For most of my life, my country has been at war. Sudan, once known as a place of vibrant and diverse political and social culture, has suffered immensely over the past two decades. Millions of people were killed, and millions more fled to safer areas of our country or abroad. In the worst affected areas, the force of weapons replaced the rule of law, communities have been destroyed, there is little infrastructure, and poverty is rampant and ever-present.

In 1990, at age 23 and a mother of two young children, I joined the Sudan People's Liberation Movement, because it was perceived as the best way to bring democracy, justice, and equality to all the people of Sudan, especially women. I was committed to saving our country and determined to make sure that women were a part of the process that would allow my children and grandchildren to live in freedom and peace. Today, I am a member of the Sudanese parliament.

Life in the bush was difficult. We had no potable water, we could do nothing to help our sick children, and there was no good food. Aerial bombardments by government warplanes made daily life nightmarish. The only source of energy was fire, but the forest was pitted with landmines, and many people were maimed as they attempted to fetch firewood. Mothers were raped or abducted and enslaved, and children died of hunger, illness, and neglect. People were continually displaced as towns were captured and recaptured by the Government of Sudan and Sudan People's Liberation Army forces.

The burden of this war weighed heavily on women, who had to sustain their families and communities while the husbands, sons, and brothers were fighting on the front lines. More than 90 percent of women in South Sudan and other war-affected areas are illiterate, both as a consequence of war and cultural beliefs. Despite this, women played effective leadership roles when men's leadership was absent. They assumed new roles as breadwinners, hut builders, and nurses for the wounded and sick under extremely difficult conditions.

If women in a war situation could sustain their families and households, and were able to keep their communities together in the absence of a proper government structure, imagine what they can do in the context of an established government.

In January 2005, the government and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement signed a peace agreement to end the civil war that cost more than 2 million lives since 1983 and displaced nearly 4 million more.

The signing of this agreement was a historic moment in Sudan and in Africa, which silenced the guns and established a new constitution and government, including nearly 100 women. This comprehensive peace agreement has brought hope to the Sudanese people, and needs to be sustained.

We still face many challenges on our road to lasting peace and stability, and we owe thanks to the many world bodies, particularly the United States of America, that have been long committed to ending the conflict between North and South Sudan. But the world community must serve as a watchdog to make sure that this agreement remains strong and effective.

We face a foreign debt exceeding \$21 billion, more than Sudan's entire annual gross domestic product. Without economic stability, Sudan will not be able to maintain the peace.

Furthermore, local leaders need skills training in legislative development and financial management in order to advance the peace-making process.

As one of the few women who participated in negotiating the CPA, I know that bringing peace to a country devastated by war was a huge and difficult task that took many years, and even now is tenuous. But peace is not merely the absence of war, it is the presence of stability and social and economic justice, and it requires the contributions of all stakeholders, especially women. As an international community, it is our obligation and in our shared interest to improve the condition of the people in Sudan.

Jemma Kumba was recently appointed to the Sudanese Parliament of the Government of National Unity, where she serves as the chairperson of the Committee for Economic Affairs. ■

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