



Sudan's 2020 Peace Agreements: What Has Been Achieved and What Remains Outstanding

Heralded as a breakthrough in resolving years-long conflicts in parts of Sudan, what are some of the challenges remaining for the October 2020 Juba Agreements?

By **Ben Lowings**
Political Analyst for North Africa

ANALYSIS
OCTOBER 2020

RETHINKING
SECURITY IN
2020 SERIES

Introduction:

On 2nd October 2020 in Juba, Sudan's transitional government made significant and historic progress in concluding a set of peace talks with various rebel groups with actual legally binding agreements. This has rightly been internationally heralded as a great and important achievement, especially in the context of Sudan's transition away from the prior regime of Omar al-Bashir. However, there are still several issues that remain to be addressed. Some are due to issues in the structure of the agreements themselves. Others are more context specific, such as problems with implementation, possible spoilers and building mutual consensus. Given some of the strict self-imposed deadlines, time will be of the essence in implementing these accords in a fair and balanced matter. Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok will face more key decisions in the months and years to come.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The 2020 Sudanese peace agreement is in fact a composition of several agreements signed between the government and various rebel groups.
- There are a few technical challenges to coherently balance expectations from all parties; including the issues of federalism and State religion.
- Implementing the agreements will be difficult given the presence of spoiler groups, who have not signed the agreements, and pre-existing economic challenges among other issues.
- Moving forward, more effort should be made to ensure citizens' voices are represented in the process.

Deciphering the 2020 Peace Agreements

A key challenge for Sudan's new agreement will be coherence¹ as there are several agreements that were signed that composed it, each with differing scopes, both geographically and in coverage of issues, and with differing signatories. Out of the several, there are four sets of agreements that are noteworthy, of which three are a direct result of the Juba negotiations that were agreed in August 2020, and signed in October²: the Agreement on National Issues (*National*)³, The Final Peace Agreement on the case of Sudan in the two areas (*Blue Nile-Kordofan*), and the seven separate agreements that relate specifically to Darfur (*Darfur*). There is also a fourth agreement, of about one page in length, signed by Prime Minister Hamdok in Addis Abbaba in September, which is notable as discussed below (*Declaration of Principles*).

While several different groups signed the *National* agreement, the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Sudan-North/the Revolutionary Movement signed *Blue Nile-Kordofan*, and the Armed Struggle Movements-Darfur Path signed the *Darfur* agreements. Between these agreements, there are only two notable armed groups that are not signatories to any agreement from Juba: the Sudan Liberation Movement (SLM), and Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North (SPLM-N). The former refusing any negotiations with the transition government due to the continued presence of the military, while the latter did proceed with some negotiations, they ultimately did not sign an agreement as their

precondition, that of Sudan becoming an officially secular State, was not met. However, SPLM-N did sign the *Declaration of Principles*⁴, which, while not an agreement in the legal sense, does indicate some possible dialogue in the future.

There are several ramifications from the negotiations. Firstly, the *National* and *Darfur* agreements have essentially rendered Sudan a federal State, with Darfur being recognised as a "region" that will come into existence within seven months⁵. *Darfur* also expects the new federal system for Sudan to be implemented within 60 days. Ironically, *Blue Nile-Kordofan* has given those areas immediate autonomy, whilst not describing them as "regions" in the technical sense. These short, immediate deadlines are the first of many technical challenges that will need to be addressed.

For the second, there is the issue of financial issues⁶. All the agreements included some details regarding new systems to better share finances and revenues equally across regions. One of these proposals was the establishment of a National Revenue Commission, but as with many such agreements, the composition of this has been somewhat unspecified. There are also some details in specifically the *Darfur* agreement that go beyond the scope of the others and may be considered unacceptable to the other signatories.

There has been some movement on the topic of State religion. Most agreements have emphasized separating religion from State matters, such as law-making, which is significant

¹ <https://www.un.org/press/en/2020/sc14314.doc.htm>

² <http://constitutionnet.org/vl/item/summary-key-issues-sudans-2020-peace-agreements>

³ The italicised names in brackets are the shorthand reference for these agreements in this text.

⁴ <https://panafricanvisions.com/2020/09/sudan-splm-n-faction-sign-declaration-of-principles-agreement/>

⁵ <http://constitutionnet.org/vl/item/summary-key-issues-sudans-2020-peace-agreements>

⁶ Ibid.

as Sudan adopted Sharia law in 1983. The *Declaration of Principles* goes further⁷ by committing to a separation of religion from State. However, given the lack of a true legally binding text, like the other agreements, this could be not so significant in the long-term.

The adoptions of a new National Constitution, as well as elections, are issues present in every text⁸. The *National* agreement specifies a time frame of six months to hold a national constitutional conference, which is again very short. In the electoral roadmap, elections are supposed to follow this process giving a timeframe of 2023 for new national elections.

Outstanding Issues: Implementation, Spoilers and Consensus-Building

And finally, there are several other areas addressed by the agreements such as transitional justice, DDR, power-sharing, equality laws as well as general issues like taxation. These are comparatively uncontroversial insofar as they seem to have been accepted by all signatories.

This is not to say, however, that there have been no controversies with this. On power-sharing, there has been some criticisms⁹ that the agreements have given too much power to the armed groups disproportionate to their size. Armed groups have been given three seats on the current-11 seat Sovereign Council, and 25% of the Cabinet and future Legislative Assembly. There are also possible issues with implementing the transitional justice pledges given the persistence

of former Bashir-era regime members in positions of power. Of note is Mohamed Hamdan “Hemedti” Dagalo, head of the Rapid Support Forces, composed of ex-Janjaweed militia and implicated in numerous atrocities¹⁰, as well as current Deputy Chairman of the Sovereignty Council.

Implementation of the outcomes of the deals will be a significant challenge in a country so impoverished by economic sanctions, internal displacement as well as the global COVID-19 pandemic. Sudan's Finance Minister, Heba Mohamed Ali Ahmed, said¹¹ that the 2020 agreements will cost US \$7.5 billion over 10 years, which is a considerable sum given the country's pre-existing economic crises.

However, there has been one notable step in the right direction insofar as on 23 October 2020 the US finally removed Sudan from their list of State sponsors of terrorism, which was a huge block towards international investment and aid. But this removal did not come without cost. Despite the achievement of the revolution last year, the US insisted upon US \$335 million reparation payments for attacks committed under the Bashir regime, in addition to fast tracking the normalisation of relations with Israel¹². Despite Sudan's crippling economic issues, the government agreed to make this payment. Additionally, there are signs that the status of the second condition may change ‘soon’¹³. Having said this, these concessions appear to be stringent, setting a precedent that transitions to democracy in themselves are insufficient for

¹⁰ VICE News. (2020) *Inside the Forgotten War in Darfur, Where the Killing Never Stopped*. [Online]

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_NlgaXrMTc4

¹¹ <https://www.france24.com/en/20201009-sudan-peace-will-cost-7-5-billion-finance-minister>

¹² <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/oct/25/sudan-rewarded-revolution-blackmail-sanctions-us-compensation>

¹³ <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/sudan-says-trump-signs-order-removing-state-from-terrorism-list/2016904>

⁷ <https://panafricanvisions.com/2020/09/sudan-splm-n-faction-sign-declaration-of-principles-agreement/>

⁸ <http://constitutionnet.org/vl/item/summary-key-issues-sudans-2020-peace-agreements>

⁹ <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2020/09/juba-peace-agreement-turning-point-sudan>

international support; that they are instead contingent upon the personal interests of big powers. It is also worrying that the Sudanese people did not have a say in this¹⁴; after all, while economic sanctions have impacts on citizens, citizens are not responsible for historical attacks, and to punish them further is tantamount to victimisation while undermining the trust in the new transitional government.

The two outlier groups, SLM and SPLM-N, could also prove to be spoilers. Though given existing dialogue processes, SLM will be the most challenging group to accommodate. Their insistence on no military component of the transitional government is unfortunately unrealistic given the nature of the Sudanese transition. That is not to say that their concerns are invalid. VOA¹⁵ and Vice News¹⁶, amongst other agencies, have reported that there has been a continuation of violence against displaced people and refugees in regions such as Darfur despite the change in regime to the transitional government. The reality, however, for those that would seek peace is that trust-building measures, as difficult as they will be, will be essential for national consensus-building that includes these regions. On this front, there could be some compromise on agreed regional security arrangements so that citizens, including former rebel groups, from these regions oversee their own regional security.

A Cautionary Sudanese Peace

Additionally, while the agreements are, as Prime Minister Hamdok claimed¹⁷, “a Sudanese peace, made with our own hands and by our own efforts”

insofar as they were achieved with remarkably little external pressure beyond South Sudan’s mediation, they are still a top-down process determined by the executive and armed group leaders. There is still significantly more work to be done to ensure that ordinary Sudanese voices are heard in Sudan’s transitional path. Having said this there are provisions for an inclusive National Constitutional Conference, as well as other processes designed to accommodate other voices such as civil society and NGOs. These options must be genuine opportunities to engage with ordinary civilians for reforms, and not token gestures.

As discussed, there are several measures, covering numerous aspects of the governance of Sudan that have been promised through these agreements. However, as with most agreements of this type, time is very short. To reform the Sudanese system, from its economy and security, to its system of government, will take money, political will from all sides and patience. Three years is a very short amount of time to have sufficient institutional stability for elections, and this is independent of Sudan’s other ongoing economic and health crises. And while Prime Minister Hamdok and his team face these domestic challenges, regional partners and the wider international community will need to be vigilant, especially in the face of any possible reversals to the promise of the Sudanese transition.

¹⁴ <https://www.cfr.org/blog/removing-sudan-state-sponsors-terrorism-list>

¹⁵ <https://www.voanews.com/africa/south-sudan-focus/sudan-peace-deal-prompts-praise-protests>

¹⁶ VICE News. (2020) *Inside the Forgotten War in Darfur, Where the Killing Never Stopped*. [Online] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_NlgaXrMTc4

¹⁷ <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2020/09/juba-peace-agreement-turning-point-sudan>

The BIC is an independent, non-profit, think-and-do tank based in the capital of Europe that is committed to developing solutions to address the cyclical drivers of insecurity, economic fragility, and conflict the Middle East and North Africa. Our goal is to bring added value to the highest levels of political discourse by bringing systemic issues to the forefront of the conversation.



**BRUSSELS
INTERNATIONAL
CENTER**

AUTHOR

Ben Lowings

Political Analyst for North Africa