



## **Justice and Equality Movement (JEM)**

### **Origins/composition**

Established early in 2003 by a group of educated, politically experienced Darfurians, many of them former members of the Popular Congress Party (PCP) of Hassan Turabi, architect of Sudan's Islamic revolution. Most of its leaders and membership initially came from the Kobe tribe, a Zaghawa sub-group more numerous in Chad than in Darfur. Since 2007, JEM has worked actively to recruit Darfurian Arabs, including from government-supported militias or 'janjaweed'.

In mid-2010, before a government offensive that led to heavy casualties on both sides, JEM was the strongest insurgent force in Darfur, estimated to have more than 5,000 men armed with mounted anti-aircraft guns, rocket-propelled grenades, heavy machine guns, AK-47s, several hundred vehicles (possibly as many as 1,000, according to one informed source), and at least two tanks seized from the government. It has had one battalion in Eritrea, a former supporter of the armed movements of eastern Sudan, since 2003, 'lying low' with 20 vehicles.

### **Leadership**

JEM's chairman is Khalil Ibrahim, a Dutch-trained doctor, devout Islamist, and superb organizer feared by the government because of his inside knowledge of the regime, in which he held a number of important posts before 2003, including as an organizer of the paramilitary Popular Defence Forces. In May 2010, Khalil was refused permission to transit through Chad to Darfur and was expelled, without papers, to the Libyan capital, Tripoli. He remains there to this day, separated from his forces in Darfur and his negotiating team at the Doha peace talks. In February 2011, Khalil appealed to the UN and a number of western governments to evacuate him to Doha for his own safety, given the turmoil in Libya. Mediation sources in Doha say the UN has so far been unable to make the necessary contacts with the relevant Libyan authorities.

From the outset, JEM had a strategy for nationwide reform and regime change, using the atrocities in Darfur to delegitimize the Khartoum government internationally. It refused to sign the Darfur Peace Agreement in May 2006, and two years later won new support in Darfur after attacking Khartoum's twin city, Omdurman. Despite the broadening of its base, JEM's real political and military power remains with the Kobe inner circle.

### **Areas of control/activity**

Expelled from Chad in February 2010 and under attack by government forces since April 2010, JEM lost its main strongholds in North Darfur, including in the mountainous Jebel Mun area, in the course of the year and reactivated a largely dormant presence across South Darfur—south of Al Daein, along the main supply route to Nyala, and south of Um Kadada. Today, although it appears reluctant to engage government forces for the time being, JEM controls strategic positions in a number of locations in South Darfur including Shearia, Muhajeriya, and Marla.



UN officials say JEM's supply route currently runs through Southern Kordofan state, where JEM is recruiting among Missiriya Arabs angered by what they see as the 'betrayal' by the government of the rights they claim in Abyei. More than 200 fatalities occurred in Southern Kordofan in November and December 2010 as a result of fighting between government forces and JEM. SPLA officials say Arab youths in North Kordofan have joined JEM 'in large numbers', especially from the Hamr tribe.

In January 2011, the director of the National Security and Intelligence Services, Mohammed Atta, claimed that JEM, under pressure in Darfur, had positioned forces in areas of South Sudan—Western Bahr al Ghazal state; north-east of Raja town; and near the border with the Central African Republic. He said senior JEM commanders including Suleiman Sandal, Ahmad Bakhit, Mahdi Hassab al Rasoul, and Awad Nur Osher were with the forces in the South; others, including Arko Suleiman Dahiya and Hashim Haroun, were in the remote Kafia Kingi triangle, a contested area between North and South Sudan. Although currently administered by South Darfur state, the triangle is claimed by the Government of South Sudan (GoSS) as part of the South.

In November 2010, Khartoum ordered air attacks on two southern villages near the border with Darfur—Kiir Adhan, on the southern side of the Kiir River, and Aweil North—targeting 'major groups' belonging to JEM that it said were moving into South Sudan with GoSS assistance. It said the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) had assisted JEM to evacuate its troops and treat its wounded.

JEM denied moving forces to the South. A senior JEM official acknowledged privately however that the GoSS had given the movement 'space for the wounded' near the border with South Darfur. Sources in the South told UN officials that 75 wounded JEM fighters were taken to a new hospital 20 km east of Kapoeta town.

On the eve of the South's self-determination referendum in January 2011, GoSS President Salva Kiir, seeking to ensure peaceful partition of the country in July, said Darfur rebels would not be permitted in the South. Khartoum however is convinced that the GoSS/SPLM is firming up its support for Darfur groups including JEM in response to fighting in greater Upper Nile, which the SPLM alleges is fomented and supported, with arms, by Khartoum.

On 21 March government planes bombed the Raja area of Western Bahr al Ghazal. An SPLA spokesman reiterated the official position that 'there are no Darfur rebels in Western Bahr el Ghazal state or any place in the South'.

**Sources of financing/support**

JEM's main external supporter following its expulsion from Chad is widely thought to be Libya, which, according to officials in Khartoum, has rearmed the movement with B-10 recoilless rifles and anti-aircraft guns and supplied vehicles and fuel. The officials say Libya has also supplied satellite telephones and mobile operating theatres. President Omar al-Bashir said in August that he had received assurances that

Libya would expel Khalil ‘within days’. Not only was Khalil not expelled, but Libya attempted to organize peace talks to rival Doha.

Towards the end of 2010, JEM established a political presence in the Ugandan capital, Kampala, along with several other Darfurian factions. Sudanese government claims that the SPLA has organized military training for JEM recruits in Uganda have not been independently confirmed, and the SPLA has denied them. Several armed opposition groups asked the SPLA for help with training and weapons, but were told the SPLA did not want to jeopardize its January 2011 referendum on self-determination by aiding the Darfur rebellion. Uganda has good relations with the SPLA and Libya, and extremely strained relations with Khartoum, which it accuses of supporting the Ugandan Lord’s Resistance Army.

Chad, JEM’s main backer early in the insurgency, expelled JEM in February 2010, reportedly with a ‘severance package’. JEM has also been generously financed by supporters in the Zaghawa and Islamist diaspora—especially by Arab Islamists who sympathized with the PCP but were expelled from Sudan, where they lost many of their assets after the Islamist movement split in 1999 and Turabi was stripped of all his power.

### **Status**

In February 2010, JEM signed a ‘framework agreement’ with the Sudanese government at the Doha talks. The agreement committed both sides to a cessation of hostilities and a prisoner release, and set an agenda for substantive talks, including on a permanent ceasefire. The agreement soon collapsed, however, with both sides accusing the other of not respecting it.

In May 2010, JEM withdrew from Doha, accusing Khartoum of not seeking peace. It returned to the negotiating table in March 2011. Mediation sources said the delegation was ‘disconcertingly cooperative’ but speculated it could be a position born of weakness.

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