



# Eastern Sudan

Following decades of widespread political and economic marginalization by successive Sudanese regimes, Eastern Sudanese leaders organized political and ultimately military opposition to the government. With Eritrean support, the Beja Congress (BC) launched an armed struggle in the early 1990s. In 2005 the BC joined the Rashaida Free Lions to form the Eastern Front. Ultimately, the military campaign ran aground on weak leadership, lack of a clear political programme, poor organization, and dependence on Eritrea, among other factors.

In October 2006, the Government of Sudan (GoS) and the Eastern Front signed the [Eastern Sudan Peace Agreement](#) (ESPA) under the almost exclusive supervision of the Eritrean government. In addition to recognizing the grievances of Eastern Sudanese communities, the agreement reflected the structure of both the Comprehensive Peace Agreement and the Darfur Peace Agreement, featuring power sharing, wealth sharing, and security arrangements (including disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration), in addition to a reconciliation conference. It also provided a framework for the rehabilitation and development of the region in the form of capacity building, strengthening infrastructure, and service provision and poverty reduction.

In accordance with the ESPA's power sharing arrangements, three senior posts were awarded to Eastern opposition representatives:

- Eastern Front Leader Musa Mohamed (Ahmed–Hadandawa tribe) became assistant to the president;
- Mabrook Salim Mabrook (Rashaida tribe), head of Rashaida Free Lions and secretary general of the political wing of the Eastern Front became state minister at the ministry of interior; and
- Dr. Amna Dirar (Beni Amir tribe), deputy chair of the political wing of the Eastern Front, became advisor to the president.

The Front was given a share (about 20%) in Eastern state ministries and local commissioner posts, in addition to a proportion of seats in the appointed national and state parliaments. Some administrative posts in civil service and positions were also allocated to the Front. The Front received a total of 48 posts: 18 went to Badaweit, 16 to Beni Amir, and 14 to Rashaida.

Of the wealth sharing provisions, the most important was the establishment of the Eastern Sudan Reconstruction and Development Fund, whereby the GoS committed to spend USD 100 million in the first year (2007) and USD 125 million in each of the four following years up through 2011, for a total of USD 600 million. The fund is managed by a committee headed by the federal minister of finance along with the three Eastern state governors, ministers of finance, and representatives of the Eastern Front.

As of July 2013, many of the terms of the ESPA have not been fully implemented. The ESPA-mandated reconciliation conference has not been held. In addition, only USD 75 million (12%) of



the mandated USD 600 million from the development fund have been allocated, according to Eastern Front leaders. These funds have been spent on the construction of schools and health units, but some of these remain dormant because they were built in areas where there is no population to use it, or because there is no staff to run them.

On the other hand, DDR has been completed, with the full caseload of 3,951 combatants (including 1,697 Eastern Front fighters and 2,254 Sudanese forces) divided over two phases, though some ex-combatants have protested their conditions.

ESPA implementation has been uneven for three main reasons. First, most of the development-related terms were not time- or budget-specific and lacked clarity with regard to distribution mechanisms between and within the three states. Second, the Reconstruction Fund committee includes nine representatives of the GoS and only three from the Eastern Front. Third, the power sharing was negotiated and implemented along tribal lines, with the Eastern Front internally split as a result. As of 2013, the Front no longer has a presence on the ground, only representatives in the government acting on behalf of its tribal components.

Further divisions among the opposition groups are evident. Since the agreement was signed, the BC split into three factions, one led by Musa Mohamed and two other factions outside government, with the power base mainly in Red Sea state. BC-Liberation and Justice is said to have started re-arming and established contact with the Revolutionary Forces Front. The Beni Amir group has also been split into four factions. The two most active of these are one led by Amna Dirar and the Eastern Sudan Democratic Forum, a new political party based in Gedarif state and led by Dr. Amal Ibrahim.

The Rashaida Free Lions, based in Kassala state, have not been politically active other than in governmental posts. A strong social movement has also emerged in Gedarif, the Gedarif Salvation Initiative, mobilizing against the National Congress Party (NCP) government. Although it is still largely urban-based and limited to Gedarif town, it presents itself as a national movement.

Politically, the Eastern Front is no longer an opposition force. In fact, its two most senior leaders, Musa Mohamed and Amna Dirar, supported Bashir for the presidency in 2010. During the most recent state Wali (gubernatorial) elections in Gedarif, in March 2013, the chairperson of the Eastern Democratic Forum ran against the NCP candidate together with a representative of the Salvation Initiative. Other parties boycotted the elections; the Eastern Front representatives in government supported the NCP candidate.

Norway was the only Western government to show interest in the Eastern Sudan peace process and agreement. Subsequently, two donor conferences were organized to support Eastern Sudan, the first led by the UN in Port Sudan 2006 (prior to the signing of the ESPA). The conference suffered from the lack of clear objectives and the different expectations on the side of government officials and donors, particularly the expectation by senior government officials in the region that funding commitments be made immediately. The second meeting occurred in Kuwait in 2011, in which some financial commitments were made, mainly by Arab countries, but until now no payments have been made. Disagreements over who is to control the funds—the federal ministry of finance or the governments of the eastern Sudanese states—is the sticking



point. Meanwhile, any follow up to the Kuwait donor conference has been overtaken by events in South Kordofan, the Doha agreement for Darfur and the conflict over borders and oil with South Sudan.

July 2013