

## **Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) (AKA JEM-Jibril)**

### **Origins/composition**

The Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) was 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 al Turabi, architect of Sudan's Islamic revolution. Most of its leaders and membership initially came from the Kobe, 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'.

From the outset, JEM sought national reform and regime change, using the atrocities in Darfur to delegitimize the government internationally. It refused to sign the Darfur Peace Agreement (DPA) 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 Zaghawa inner circle.

In mid-2010, before a government offensive that led to heavy casualties on both sides, JEM was 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. To this day, and despite splits in the movement, JEM remains the strongest and most cohesive military force in Darfur. Its weakness continues to be the lack of a wider constituency among Darfurians.

### **Leadership**

JEM's late chairman, Khalil Ibrahim, was a Dutch-trained doctor, devout Islamist, and superb organizer feared by the government because of his inside knowledge of the ruling party, in which he held a number of important posts before 2003, including as an organizer of the paramilitary Popular Defence Forces.

On 25 December 2011, Khalil Ibrahim was killed by a government airstrike while leading the majority of JEM's forces east from their rear base in Wadi Huwar on the Chad/North Darfur border. Tahir al Faki was made interim leader until a JEM leadership conference could elect a new permanent chairman. On 26 January 2012, Khalil's brother, Jibril Ibrahim, was elected chairman. On 3 February 2012, a new 18-member JEM executive office was appointed.

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

Expelled from Chad in February 2010 and under attack by Sudanese government forces since April that year, JEM lost its main strongholds in North Darfur, including in the mountainous Jebel Mun area, over the course of the year and reactivated a largely dormant presence across South Darfur—south of Ed Daein, along the main supply route to Nyala, and south of Um Kadada.

In May 2010, Khalil Ibrahim was refused permission to transit through Chad to Darfur and was expelled, without papers, to the Libyan capital, Tripoli. He remained



there through the turmoil in that country, ‘escaping’ across the Libyan desert to Darfur from 5–11 September 2011 in what JEM termed ‘Mission Sahara Leap’.

Despite the Sudan–Chad rapprochement, JEM re-entered North Darfur via Chad. Chadian elements of the Chad–Sudan border protection force turned a blind eye. This was possible thanks to the assistance of sympathizers within the Chadian inner circle. Relations between the two states did not suffer greatly as a result, however, because the Government of Sudan (GoS) has come to accept that Chadian President Idriss Déby does not have complete control over the Zaghawa ruling elite.

The eruption of tensions in South Kordofan and Blue Nile between the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement-North (SPLM-N) and the GoS following South Sudan’s secession set in motion new alliances among the Darfur insurgent groups—including JEM, the Sudan Liberation Army-Abdul Wahid (SLA-AW), and the Sudan Liberation Army-Minni Minawi (SLA-MM), who came together as the Sudan Revolutionary Front (SRF). They subsequently announced regime change by either political or military means as the only solution to a national problem of which Darfur was only one expression.

In keeping with the new South Kordofan-based alliance under the SRF, the bulk of JEM’s forces were being moved to South Kordofan under Khalil Ibrahim’s command when he was attacked and killed in Wad Banda, North Kordofan in December 2011. JEM’s achievement since then has been to partially integrate itself in areas along the South Kordofan/South Darfur/South Sudan border—areas where it has no Zaghawa kin hosts. Instead, JEM has recruited mid-tier leadership and fighters among the local tribes allowing the movement to become a more “local” force. The overall leadership of this force is JEM’s long-time chief of staff Suleiman Sandal.

Smaller liaison units are present in Juba, South Sudan, and Kampala, Uganda. A small unit is also based in Eritrea, near the eastern border with Sudan. JEM also retained a presence in North Darfur, near its traditional bastion of Wadi Huwar under the command of JEM commander in chief, Bakheit Abdallah Abdel Karim (Dabajo). This force broke away from JEM on 11 September 2012, to form JEM-Bashar.

JEM’s strategic reorientation towards South Kordofan has also led to a more integrated tactical relationship with South Sudan than previously. In February 2012, JEM and SPLA reinforcements rode north through the Yida refugee camp to help SPLA-North repel a SAF attack on Jaw, the border crossing between South Sudan’s Unity state and SPLA-North-controlled South Kordofan. The Jaw battle was significant for bringing South Sudan’s SPLA, JEM, and SPLA-North together fighting against SAF. A month later, JEM played a key role in capturing Hejlij, the disputed border oil town controlled by Sudan. Even as South Sudan continued to deny any links to JEM, and Sudan accused South Sudan of supporting the SRF alliance, JEM maintained a visible presence in Bentiu, the base of South Sudan’s operations, and JEM vehicles streamed in and out of the SPLA’s temporary forward operating base in Hejlij. SPLA and JEM interests diverged when South Sudan President Salva Kiir, under pressure from the international community, ordered SPLA to withdraw from Hejlij, forcing JEM to also abandon its offensive northward. JEM units advanced as far north as the Karasana outskirts during the clashes.

### **Sources of financing/support**

JEM's main external supporter, following its expulsion from Chad, was Libya, which, according to officials in Khartoum, rearmed the movement with B-10 recoilless rifles and anti-aircraft guns, and supplied vehicles and fuel. JEM is rumored to have received anywhere between USD 10–100 million from Libya during the unrest there in return for a role in supporting the government, either directly or by mobilizing fighters in its tribal network. With the fall of the Gaddafi regime, and its replacement by a Libyan government more sympathetic to Khartoum, prospects of further Libyan funding are slim. In the future, JEM will need to rely on funding from Darfurian diaspora, sources sympathetic to PCP leader Turabi, and also hope for continued support from South Sudan and Uganda.

Towards the end of 2010, JEM established a political presence in Kampala, along with several other Darfurian factions. The Ugandan government has organized military training for JEM recruits outside Kampala. Uganda has good relations with the SPLM and Libya, and extremely strained relations with Khartoum, which it accuses of supporting Joseph Kony and the 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, losing many of their assets, after the Islamist movement split in 1999 and Turabi was stripped of power.

### **Status**

In February 2010, JEM signed a framework agreement with the GoS 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 blaming the other.

In May 2010, JEM withdrew from Doha, accusing Khartoum of not seeking peace. It returned to the negotiating table in March 2011, but refused to sign the 14 August 2011 agreement between the Liberation and Justice Movement (LJM) and the GoS, stating its readiness to continue negotiations, but only if the entire substance of the agreement was reopened. The GoS has refused to do this, permitting discussions on the security protocol only. JEM's rhetoric focuses on building an opposition coalition for regime change, although never explicitly ruling out a negotiated settlement.

The movement was seriously divided over the decision to reject the Doha agreement and more generally the national- vs. Darfur-specific agenda. On 26 September 2011, Mohamed Bahr Hamadein, deputy chairman and head of the Kordofan sector, was relieved of his post. JEM alleged he was plotting to sign a separate peace agreement with the GoS in Doha. At the request of JEM's leadership, the Government of South Sudan arrested eight Juba-based JEM political liaison cadres linked to Hamadein. Hamadein has been waiting to finalize negotiations with the GoS in Doha but, impatient with the lack of progress, has recently made sounds about joining the SRF alliance. The release of one of the eight prisoners signals a thaw in relations between Hamadein and JEM. Hamadein is unlikely to return to JEM, but the easing of tensions would facilitate a move to the SRF as an independent member. Hamadein is unlikely



to join the Doha Document for Peace in Darfur (DDPD), and the GoS is not seriously considering new agreements outside of the DDPD.

On 3 October 2011, the Sudanese Bloc to Liberate the Republic (SBLR) announced it was joining JEM. SBLR leader Magoub Hussein, formerly a member of the LJM, was relieved of his post as vice chairman for political and media affairs on 14 July 2011 after he was accused of negotiating a separate track with the GoS in Doha.

In mid-January 2012 a new JEM faction emerged. Zakaria Musa formed JEM Corrective Leadership (JEM-CL) following Khalil Ibrahim's death. Musa said the split resulted from the Kobe clan's dominance of JEM, the continuing imprisonment of the Hamadein-linked cadre in South Sudan, and the desire for peace. Soon after JEM-CL emerged, it was welcomed in Khartoum as a new signatory to the DDPD. But since the announcement, the group has returned to Darfur saying a final agreement has not been reached.

On 13 April 2012, an LJM splinter faction signed a merger with JEM. The deal was inked by Ahmed Hussein Adam, JEM foreign relations secretary, and Sayed Charif Jarel Nabi, acting leader of the LJM breakaway group.

Jibril Ibrahim's appointment as JEM chairman inflamed tensions within the movement, especially with the JEM forces based on the North Darfur/Chad border under the command of JEM commander in chief, Bakheit Abdallah Abdel Karim (Dabajo). Nominally, Jibril's lack of military field experience was the focus of criticism. For his part, Jibril suspected Dabajo's involvement in an alleged plot to poison former JEM chairman Khalil Ibrahim in early 2012 while based in Tripoli, Libya. Both UNAMID and Chad's President Idriss Déby reached out to Dabajo, seeking to coax him into signing the DDPD (Déby's latent interest lies in weakening JEM, always viewed as a threat for its elite Zaghawa connections).

Acting preemptively, Jibril relieved Dabajo of his command on 9 August 2012, but his troops elected to remain with him, leading Dabajo to form a separate movement on 11 September under the leadership of Mohamed Bashar. Shortly after, on 16 September, Dabajo issued a statement hinting at his openness to enter negotiations in Doha provided certain conditions are met, and a series of agreements were signed in the following months. JEM-Bashar acceded to the DDPD in April 2013.

JEM, now also known as JEM-Jibril, soon took its revenge at this betrayal; its forces intercepted JEM-Bashar's leadership on their return to Darfur in May 2013, killing Mohamed Bashar and other senior members of the movement. JEM has repeatedly denounced the Doha process and its attack on Bashar makes it even less likely that the movement will ever return to Doha in its current configuration.

JEM continues to militarily engage the government in Darfur and Kordofan; as part of the SRF, its April 2013 attack on Um Rawaba, North Kordofan's second largest town, surprised Khartoum and caught SAF unprepared. In July, JEM continued major offensives against SAF, attacking Rahad locality in North Kordofan and the outskirts of Dilling, South Kordofan, that state's second largest city.

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