

**INTER-AGENCY STANDING COMMITTEE WORKING GROUP  
4 June 1996, Washington, D.C.**

**COUNTRY SPECIFIC ISSUES  
Sudan: OLS Review**

**Introduction**

1. At its 19 April 1996 meeting in Geneva, IASC members agreed that DHA should continue to closely monitor developments affecting the humanitarian programme in the Sudan, and called upon it to lead a process of coordinated contingency planning so that alternative strategies for continued humanitarian assistance would be in place should the delivery of humanitarian assistance to southern Sudan, through the existing Operation Lifeline Sudan (OLS) framework, be made more difficult.

**Conditions Currently Endangering the Future of OLS**

2. Both the Government of the Sudan and the southern movements have military and political objectives which condition the scope and effectiveness of OLS activities. Nonetheless, since 1989, when OLS began as a short-term programme to deliver food and other life-saving provisions, it has evolved to the point where it is the focus of most international aid assistance to the country. Over the last year and a half, however, the multilateral framework upon which OLS was founded, has been undermined, in various ways, particularly by the Sudanese Government, to limit the field of humanitarian action.
3. Currently, the Government's position is as follows:
  - 1) the conditions under which it authorised OLS, and in so doing ceded a part of its sovereignty to the UN, are no longer applicable (GOS controls the greater part of southern Sudan whereas in 1989 it did not); a corollary to this position is that agreements under which OLS operates are (or should be) bilateral rather than multilateral;
  - 2) despite claims that they assist OLS in providing relief to all war-affected persons in the Sudan, GOS does not recognize the claim that OLS should be granted access to all parts of the country (case in point: Nuba Mountains);

- 3) OLS reorient its operations away from relief towards rehabilitation and long-term development;
- 4) earmarking of OLS funds (distinguishing between northern and southern sector programmes) shifts donor contributions away from GOS priorities; and,
- 5) OLS neutrality vis-à-vis southern movements and the transparency of its operations are questionable.

4. This position is reflected in a number of specific demands and restrictions, among which: progressive transfer of OLS bases out of northern Kenya and Nairobi into Sudanese territory; extension of policy of denying access to specific locations by including broad geographical areas (Nuba Mountains) and selected OLS aircraft (C-130 notably); imposition of universal, if temporary, flight restrictions on all OLS aircraft (late Nov. - early Dec. 1995; early April 1996); attempt to micro-manage OLS by calling into question OLS assessments and consequent allotment of aid; bureaucratic obstruction of international NGOs operating ex-Khartoum.

5. GOS restrictions on OLS activities have at times also taken a more intimidating form: bombing areas of ongoing relief activities in southern Sudan; implication in looting of relief convoys and threats to OLS personnel.

6. As a direct result of these conditions, OLS southern sector is currently delivering aid which covers only 20-40 percent of identified needs; in addition, access and programme impact is non-existing or severely curtailed in certain severely affected areas (Nuba Mountains, Khartoum displaced).

7. As the war wears on, a progress of fragmentation among southern movements has eroded some of the basis of OLS support. In the past, while various splinter groups in the South have alternately courted and threatened OLS in a bid to gain political legitimacy, the usefulness of OLS both as a provider of humanitarian aid and a platform for international attention on the situation in the South remained incontrovertible. Now, various factors could possibly lead to a radicalisation of the remaining southern opposition movements in which OLS, in its present form, might become expendable.

8. This scenario gains greater plausibility upon examination of the following factors:

- 1) the failure of all previous political attempts at a negotiated solution (Abuja talks under the aegis of the Organisation of African Unity; regional peace negotiations

sponsored since 1993 by the Inter-Government Authority on Drought and Development); and,

- 2) the forging of new, if questionable, alliances between the Government and a number of former adversaries (The South Sudan Independence Movement led by Dr. Riak Machar; the Sudanese People's Liberation Movement/Army-United) in which the SPLA finds itself increasingly isolated domestically as a representative of southern opposition, yet is still the only remaining southern movement credible and powerful enough to mobilize significant military backing.

### **Possible Developments**

9. Before the end of 1996, either one of two situations could confront humanitarian aid agencies working in the Sudan. The first, more radical and far-reaching for OLS, would be triggered by a break with OLS by either of the major parties (GOS or southern movement represented by the SPLM/A): The other entails the effective re-confirmation of OLS.

- a) Disavowal of OLS:

In early August 1995, DHA informed the Government that the upcoming OLS Review, whose objective is to assess OLS effectiveness and appropriateness, would be the forum for examining all GOS demands for a modification of the present modus operandi.

Having grudgingly permitted the exercise to run its course, the Government may reject Review findings which clash with its declared aim of assuming total control over the Operation. The most extreme form of such a rejection would be to declare the exercise invalid. The general tone for such an anti-UN decision could be set by those in authority who see OLS as a political instrument for supporting southern rebellion and who claim recent UN Security Council sanctions against the Sudan have been instigated by the country's arch-enemies.

In the case of the southern movements, for all intents and purposes now confined to the SPLM/A, abandoning OLS could occur if military, political and humanitarian backing were secured for a completely independent operation in defiance of GOS claims of sovereignty and territorial integrity. Basically, the strategy is designed to provoke the Government into acts of retaliation and

strengthen the SPLA's position through an escalation of the conflict regionally and internationally.

In such a scenario, the public position to be taken by the SPLA would involve their citing excessive Government control over UN agencies involved in OLS and the consequent shortfall in programme effectiveness. The SPLA would claim that on legitimate humanitarian grounds serving the interests of civilian war-affected populations in the South requires that they work exclusively with selected international NGOs.

b) Re-confirmation of OLS:

In the name of prudence, the Government may decide that confrontation is less advisable than containment through a proven policy of limited cooperation. The tactics of obstruction would be pursued with the aim of further constricting the range of OLS' impact in areas controlled by the opposition. Conversely, in areas re-captured from the opposition, the Government will in all likelihood wish to keep its options open with respect to OLS, including that of active support.

The SPLA would perceive that a complete politicisation of the humanitarian effort is not a realistic option at this time (for want of adequate support) and by the force of events seek to preserve OLS (if only in areas under its direct control) while attempting to pursue its political and military agendas.

## **Implications for OLS**

10. A break with OLS, by either the Government or the southern movements, must be avoided since it may lead to a situation in which non-UN (or perhaps OLS) agencies attempt to service populations in various enclaves in the South controlled by anti-Government movements. For different reasons, neither the Government nor the UN could subscribe to such an arrangement. In the specific case of the Government, it is unlikely that they would sacrifice an operation over which they maintain a clear position of authority for one which provides similar support yet escapes their total control. From the perspective of the UN, the failure of Member States to re-affirm OLS as the only legitimate framework for humanitarian operations in the Sudan would also be a disavowal of the UN's humanitarian mandate and could lead to an intensification of the armed conflict within the Sudan and the prospect of further confrontation among countries in the sub-region.

11. Moreover, without a UN presence, the position of those non-UN agencies attempting to continue relief activities in the south would become increasingly untenable: either the Government will declare such activities illegal (cf. above), or, should they tolerate such a presence, will eventually seek to impose control measures aimed at severely reducing agencies' ability to implement programmes.

## **Recommendations**

### 12a) Mobilizing Support for OLS Review Process

Without Member States' support, notably among donor countries, the future of OLS will be seriously jeopardized, perhaps irrevocably. A critical phase will occur in July when the OLS Review team presents its findings. Before meetings scheduled at the end of July with Government and southern movement representatives (scheduled tentatively for the week of 22-27 July), the final Review report should be distributed to donors in view of enlisting their endorsement for the continuation of OLS. Meetings of the Humanitarian Liaison Working Group (HLWG) should also be used as a forum for presenting DHA's position on the relevant issues.

### 12b) IASC Public Statement

The IASC should issue a statement expressing full support for OLS and calling upon the parties to the conflict (GOS, southern movement) to maintain their commitment to its principles and programmes. Such a statement would also refer to certain recommendations contained in the OLS Review final report.

### 12c) USG Letter to OLS Donor Countries

The Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, on behalf of the IASC, should address a letter to key OLS donor countries requesting their continued backing for OLS and urging them to convey this message to the Sudanese Government (and of southern movements by informal channels if necessary).

### 12d) Enlargement of Scope of Multilateral Negotiations on Humanitarian Issues Affecting OLS

The focus of negotiation efforts undertaken by the UN Special Envoy for Humanitarian Affairs, Ambassador Vieri Traxler, needs to be broadened to address issues affecting the future of OLS which may emerge from the OLS Review. The importance and complexity

of issues to be addressed may warrant DHA's exploring a more multi-track approach to these negotiations in which representatives from key donor and relief agencies might play an active role.