

U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
Chairman John F. Kerry
Opening Statement For Hearing on Sudan
May 12, 2010

Chairman Kerry: “This is truly a critical moment for Sudan”

WASHINGTON, D.C. –Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman John Kerry (D-MA) today chaired a hearing to explore U.S. policy toward Sudan, the comprehensive peace agreement, and the crisis in Darfur.

Full text of Chairman Kerry’s opening statement as prepared is below:

Thank you all for coming. We’re pleased to welcome a familiar face back to the Committee. General Scott Gration, the President’s Special Envoy for Sudan, is just back from travels to East Africa. He joins us this morning to discuss what is truly a critical moment for Sudan.

Many emergencies come with little warning. But in Sudan today, we have not only a map of the fault lines, but a timetable for the tectonic shifts ahead. In January 2011, the people of Southern Sudan are scheduled to vote in a referendum on independence. Every credible poll predicts that the outcome will be a vote for separation. Multiple experts also tell us that if the referendum does not take place on time, then the renewal of a war that claimed 2 million lives becomes tragically likely.

Far less certain is how to find a peaceful path forward. Southern Sudan is not preordained as a failed state, but its fragility is clear. And neither the modalities for peaceful separation nor the mechanisms for successful governance currently exist.

We all understand the stakes. According to Director of National Intelligence Dennis Blair, while a number of countries in Asia and Africa are at significant risk of a new outbreak of mass killing over the next five years, Southern Sudan is the place where “a new mass killing or genocide is most likely to occur.”

The implications of Sudan’s instability do not end at its borders. Countries dependent on the Nile’s waters or anxious about their own separatist movements have concerns. Southern Sudan’s neighbors worry about an exodus of refugees. And the Lord’s Resistance Army continues to wreak havoc across Southern Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and the Central African Republic.

The 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement was intended to create a different future. The larger peace crafted by that agreement has held, but hopes for democratic transformation – an ambitious goal for just five years – have gone unfulfilled. Last month, Sudan held its first national elections in a quarter century, as called for under the CPA. The Sudan People’s Liberation Movement and the other opposition parties ultimately boycotted the elections in the North, citing intimidation, voter fraud, and other acts. The White House and most independent observers described the process as seriously flawed from beginning to end.

Today we want to understand the significance of the balloting, but we also need to look at the larger picture of Sudan’s challenges.

That includes Darfur, where the current deadlock leaves many people in camps trapped in what our top diplomat in Sudan described to me as “miserable stasis.” Others in areas such as Jebel Marra are exposed to renewed fighting with Khartoum’s old tactics causing new waves of anguish, civilian casualties, and displacement.

While the CPA provides a timetable for North and South, there is no clear agenda for a peace agreement in Darfur. For those in the camps, seven years after the onset of the genocide, the questions remain the same: land, security, justice and compensation. We must find a way for their voices to be heard—and we need to empower Darfur’s civil society, not simply its armed men.

We must also ensure continued humanitarian assistance to the millions of people in need in Darfur, including vital protection programs that were lost when Khartoum expelled 13 aid groups in March 2009. And we should explore whether simultaneous early recovery activities can be pursued in tandem with humanitarian aid to make lives better for Darfur’s long suffering people.

With a timetable for one potential calamity laid out before us, and an ongoing crisis still playing out in Darfur, this is the moment for contingency planning, ensuring that we have the resources in place to respond to events, and working proactively with the Sudanese North and South, the UN, Sudan's neighbors and other partners to prevent the worst from coming to pass. Given Dennis Blair's warning, the stakes are clear. And our window to help the Sudanese people find a peaceful solution is rapidly closing.

It's time for Congress to reengage on Sudan. As the CPA nears its final act, I am developing legislation to help shape our Sudan policy and ensure that our policies maximize the chances of peace. The bill will seek to re-frame U.S. assistance; prepare for the potential changes that may come; accelerate contingency planning; send important signals to Khartoum, Juba, and other partners; and build U.S. diplomatic and development capacity to address what may become a very difficult season in the life of Africa's largest country. I look forward to working with the Administration and with my colleagues here today to lay the groundwork for meeting the complex and pressing challenge we face.

Our sole witness this morning is General Scott Gration, the President's Special Envoy to Sudan. Given the regional stakes, we would have welcomed another witness from the State Department to share a broader perspective. But we do appreciate USAID's willingness to contribute to this discussion and provide a written statement, and we welcome General Gration.

###