

# Sanctions and the political process for Darfur

An interview with  
Jan Eliasson



*Jan Eliasson (right) with Salim Ahmed Salim, AU Special Envoy for Darfur, October 2007.*

Source: UN Photo/Fred Noy

Ambassador Jan Eliasson, Special Envoy of the UN Secretary-General for Darfur since December 2006 and formerly President of the UN General Assembly, was interviewed for Accord by Mikael Eriksson (European University Institute) in August 2007.

***[Mikael Eriksson]: What are the main forms of strategic pressure the international community have been exerting on the Sudanese government and non-signatory armed groups in Darfur?***

[Jan Eliasson]: The main form of pressure on the Sudanese stakeholders is political, channelled through the UN Security Council and the Africa Union (AU). Obviously some key member states of these organizations play an extra important role outside these institutions, especially through bilateral means, as is the case with the US and China. Both organizations though are very important for us as mediators in Darfur as they form the backbone of international influence. Besides the institutional pressures exercised, I believe that moral pressure expressed in global public opinion is pivotal.

***Do you believe that clear and concrete conditions applicable to positive and punitive measures have been clearly communicated to the Sudanese parties?***

I do not believe that all conditions have been fully communicated. For a long time, particularly the years following the 2003-04 security agreements between north and south, the UN Security Council was not unified on how to handle the situation in Darfur. Disunity has also been visible among many African countries. The many different opinions on how to handle the situation have sent mixed signals to the stakeholders. The ambiguous attitude from several countries, I believe, reflects states' own concerns on sovereignty issues – another example is Zimbabwe, where regional leaders are reluctant to pressure the Mugabe regime. In recent months the position vis-à-vis Sudan has become more united.

***What principles – if any – should be applied in the timing of punitive and positive measures in relation to an ongoing political process?***

My general belief is that measures should be implemented as early as possible. But one needs a carrot-and-stick approach or these measures are not likely to work. The minimum requirement for any type of measure is that there has to be a credible threat in place. The government of Sudan has never experienced this credibility. With a changing Chinese approach to Darfur, the international pressure is becoming more credible.

***What role do the UN's targeted sanctions play in the current conflict?***

I am a strong believer in targeted sanctions: they effect those in responsible positions rather than hurt innocent people. However, sanctions are seldom implemented properly, which means they are not respected in the long run. Sanctions cannot be implemented half-heartedly. For instance, the ban on arms and other

military material is not working properly, which undermines the efforts to achieve peace. Effective implementation is needed.

***Have UN targeted sanctions had any immediate effect on those targeted, or have these sanctions only been used for symbolic value?***

The UN targeted sanctions on Darfur have, I must admit, been mostly symbolic. But what is important is that they seem to have had a stigmatizing effect. Being sanctioned in person is not something that any political or military actor welcomes. Being placed on a sanctions list means that you become an international pariah. Moreover, when the International Criminal Court (ICC) mentions names in public, it creates waves of concern among those engaged in obstructing the peace, which hopefully affects the behaviour of listed targets and presumed future targets. Even the most stubborn political actors are sensitive to being identified as possible war criminals.

One could, however, discuss whether sanctions could make peace negotiations more difficult. If a person is put on a list and his name is mentioned by the ICC, what incentive does this person have to sign an agreement? Why should he sign a deal when he risks being extradited to a war crimes tribunal? This is a dilemma. But an important aspect, which should not be underestimated or forgotten, is that one intention of targeted sanctions is to reduce the targets' abilities to move around and spoil conditions for peace.

***Speaking of sanctions in relation to your mission to revive the political process on Darfur, you have been quoted as saying 'it's not bad to have the drums in the background,' while emphasizing the primacy of working hard to open up diplomatic space.***

The ideal situation is when there is drumbeating in the background. For instance, the Tripoli Declaration of July 2006 increased pressure on the parties, which was good from a negotiating point of view. But the drums should not make so much noise that they overwhelm my voice. Another strategy is that certain conditions or sanctions could be introduced during the process, but not implemented until one has evaluated if the concerned parties' behaviour has changed. At the moment though we do not want to impose more sanctions as it risks deadlocking the dialogue.

***Since the UN is the main source of targeted sanctions on Sudanese actors, does this impact on your own role as a negotiator in Sudan?***

Not so much. Actors know that I report directly to the UN Secretary-General, Ban-Ki Moon, and the UN

Security Council. They know that while we are relevant and recognized actors, it is primarily the UN Security Council which will determine further actions.

***In terms of positive sanctions, what principles should guide the international community when dealing with rebels and the government?***

Sanctions and conditionality should be based on the principle of rewards for moderation and cooperation. For instance if a final Darfur accord is signed, the donor community needs to be involved in the following development work. But carrots cannot be the only principle. A price has to be paid as well if cooperation does not take place. But too many times I have seen cooperation without reward, in which case the situation may get worse. For instance in Iran, President Khatami started a dialogue with the West, but his actions were not fully recognized. He was followed by President Ahmadinejad and his hawkish policies. If targets or concerned actors do not receive proper rewards they lose confidence and internal standing and the sender loses credibility. I am in favour of a system based on rewards. Going back to the issue of listing targets, it signals to those that are not on the list that they have not been included for a particular reason – a kind of reward on the basis of their behaviour.

***Is it possible to measure the efficacy of sanctions? And can this be done during the heat of diplomacy or only over a longer time span?***

This is a difficult question. Such evaluations are not necessarily made, but rather efficacy is something that a mediator has to judge.

***Given the ongoing violence in Darfur, do you think the international community was too hasty in trying to force a Darfur Peace Agreement (DPA) in May 2006? What lessons can be learnt?***

It is possible that there was too much haste in putting that agreement in place. The agreement lacked popular support. Without support from local leaders and civil society, the conditions for sustainable peace are not in place. I guess one went into the negotiations with too much speed, just for the sake of stopping the violence. The negotiations were far away from Darfur, which may have contributed to the fact that little attention was paid to anchoring the decisions. But these lessons have been learnt. Now, prior to another negotiation round, we are putting a lot of effort into visiting various towns, villages and camps all over Darfur to seek as much support as possible.