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Sudan: The Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), including objectives, leadership and activities; treatment by authorities (2015-February 2017)
Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

1. Overview

A 2010 Al Jazeera report on the political parties of Sudan states that the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) "is the oldest political party in Sudan and is considered the main opposition to the ruling party" (Al Jazeera 7 Apr. 2010). According to sources, the National Unionist Party and the People's Democratic Party merged to form the DUP in 1967 (MICT 2012, 41-42; Gurtong n.d.a) or 1968 (UK 16 Apr. 2010, 176). Sources further state that the DUP was the partner in the coalition government of Prime Minister Mahdi and the Umma Party (UP) (International Crisis Group 4 May 2011, 6; PHW 2015, 1386) in 1986 (PHW 2015, 1386). The Political Handbook of the World 2015 indicates that the DUP withdrew from government in 1988 as the Umma Party failed to recognize a peace agreement it had brokered with the Sudanese People's Liberation Army (SPLA) [1], but rejoined in 1989 (PHW 2015, 1386).

According to sources, on 30 June 1989, the Mahdi government was overthrown in a coup led by Omar al-Bashir (PHW 2015, 1386). Al Jazeera 18 Dec. 2010). The PHW states that the military regime subsequently "banned all political parties" (PHW 2015, 1386). Sources indicate that following the coup, the DUP's leader Muhammad Uthman al-Mirghani [al-Merghani] went into exile (US 2015, 258; UK 16 Apr. 2010, 176). According to sources, the DUP is a founding member of the opposition umbrella group National Democratic Alliance (NDA) (UK 16 Apr. 2010, 176; MICT 2012, 42). Sources further report that Uthman al-Mirghani became NDA chair in 1995 (UK 16 Apr. 2010, 176; US 2015, 258), or 2000 (PHW 2015, 1393).

A 2001 report on a fact finding mission by the Danish Immigration Service cites Saif el Nasr Idrees Ishaw, the Chairman of the Sudan Federal Democratic Alliance, as explaining that the DUP is a "split party" (Denmark 1 Dec. 2001, 16). The same report indicates that the DUP is divided into the Hindi, Mirghani and "a number of smaller factions," with DUP-Mirghani opposing the government, and DUP-Hindi supporting the government (Denmark 1 Dec. 2001, 17). Similarly, a country report on Sudan produced by the US Library of Congress notes that when al-Mirghani was in exile, President Bashir was able to co-opt "several" DUP leaders, including Zayn al-Abdin al-Hindi, "who applied to have the DUP re-established under the 1998 Political Associations Act," an initiative which was rejected by the DUP leadership in exile (US 2015, 258). PHW states that "a DUP splinter faction, calling itself the DUP-General Secretariat, accepted cabinet posts in the government in February 2001 and in the the 2005 unity government" (PHW 2015, 1393). The same source indicates that the DUP-General Secretariat was represented by Sharif Zein al-Abidir al-Hindi until his death in...

The US Library of Congress Country study on Sudan states that relations between al-Mirghani and the Sudan government led by al-Bashir "remained delicate until the NDA and Khartoum signed an agreement in June 2005" (US 2015, 258). An April 2010 Al Jazeera article similarly indicates that the NDA and the Sudanese government signed "a deal" in June 2005 (Al Jazeera 7 Apr. 2010). Sources report that the DUP joined the unity government led by the National Congress Party (NCP) in 2011 (Sudan Tribune 27 Feb. 2016) or "has been in coalition … with the ruling NCP since 2011" (International Crisis Group 26 Nov. 2013, 29). PHW indicates that both the DUP and the DUP-Original "received ministries in the … 2011 unity government" (PHW 2015, 1393). Further and corroborating information on the DUP and its factions could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

2. Objectives

According to International Crisis Group, the DUP is "one of Sudan's two main 'traditional' parties" (International Crisis Group 26 Nov. 2013, 29). PHW describes the DUP as a "right-of center" party that "draws its principal strength from the Khatmiya Muslims of northern and eastern Sudan" (PHW 2015, 1393). Similarly, the UK 2010 Country of Origin Report cites Europa Publications' Regional Surveys of the World: Africa South of the Sahara 2005 (51st Edition) as indicating that DUP is "[c]onservative in political outlook" and "a largely secularist Islamic centre party supported primarily by the Khatmiya Islamic order" (UK 16 Apr. 2010, 176).

According to a 2011 International Crisis Group report, the DUP has "long advocated an Islamic state" (International Crisis Group 4 May 2011, 34). Similarly, PHW indicates that "the DUP was described by Middle East International in early 1994 as … 'not adverse to some form of Islamic state' for Sudan" (PHW 2015, 1393). Gurtong Trust - Peace and Media Project (Gurtong), a South Sudan-based independent non-profit project aiming to remove "all ethnic, political or personal obstacles on the way to unity, peace and mutual respect among South Sudanese" (Gurtong n.d.b), indicates that the DUP stresses its "commitment to the principles of tolerant Islam, which is based on justice, equality and social solidarity... with full respect for all religions and beliefs and customs." It promotes "securing the unity of the country's land and people." (Gurtong n.d.a)

The 2010 Al Jazeera report indicates that the DUP boycotted the legislative elections in December 2000 (Al Jazeera 7 Apr. 2010). The same source adds that the party's position has shifted towards a more mediatory role, attempting to re-align the old and new opposition parties in a comprehensive stance to tackle the broader Sudanese issues such as unity, elections and transition into democracy - avoiding polarisation which it views as damaging to the long term interests of the country. (Al Jazeera 7 Apr. 2010)

Similarly, according to the 2015 country study on Sudan produced by the US Library of Congress, when the DUP "resumed engagement in Sudanese politics" in 2005, it aimed to "realign old and new opposition parties in a comprehensive way to confront broader issues such as national unity and the transition to democracy" (US 2015, 259). In a 20 January 2017 article, The Sudan Tribune, a Paris-based news website that aims to "promote plural information, democratic and free debate on Sudan" (Sudan Tribune n.d.b), cited the DUP as having recently asked both the government and opposition parties to "listen to the voice of people to achieve peace and stability according to the national accord reference, democratic rule mechanisms and the rule of law" (Sudan Tribune 21 Jan. 2017).

Gurtong reports that, in foreign policy, the DUP "aims at close relations" with Egypt (Gurtong n.d.a). PHW further indicates that in 1986, the DUP faction led by Uthman al-Mirghani included "pro-Egyptian traditionalists" (PHW 2015, 1394).

3. Leadership

PHW states that Muhammad Uthman al-Mirghani is chair of the DUP (PHW 2015, 1393). Without providing further detail, the same source also describes Uthman al-Mirghani as the DUP's "Symbolic Chair" (PHW 2015, 1393). The Danish Immigration Service’s 2001 fact finding mission report similarly indicates that...
Muhammad Uthman al-Mirghani is the leader of the DUP-Mirghani faction (Denmark 1 Dec. 2001, 17). According to the Sudan country study produced by the US Library of Congress, al-Mirghani has led the party since 1968 (US 2015, 258). The same report further indicates that Uthman al-Mirghani is also the "hereditary Khatmiyyah spiritual leader" (US 2015, 258). Similarly, Al Jazeera notes that al-Mirghani is the head of the Khatmiya Sufi order (Al Jazeera 7 Apr. 2010).

A June 2015 Sudan Tribune article indicates that Mohammed al-Hassan al-Mirghani, the "acting head" of the DUP, entered the government as Bashir's assistant by a decree of the president (Sudan Tribune 7 June 2015). Similarly, an August 2015 article by the Sudan News Agency (SUNA), Sudan's official news agency (SUNA n.d.) indicates that Mohamed al-Hassan Mohammad Osman Al-Mirghani is President Bashir's "First Assistant" (SUNA 6 Aug. 2015). According to the Sudan Tribune, he is the son of the DUP leader al-Mirghani and the "de facto chairman of the DUP" (Sudan Tribune 27 Feb. 2016).

PHW indicates that Jalal al-Digair is the leader of the DUP General Secretariat (PHW 2015, 1393). Further and corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

According to sources, Hatim al-Sir was the DUP presidential candidate in the 2010 elections (Sudan Tribune n.d.c; US 2015, 259). Sources report he received 2 percent of the vote (US 2015, 259; BBC 27 Apr. 2010) or 1.93 percent of the vote (Sudan Tribune, n.d.c). An article from Al Arabiya News, a Dubai-based "24-hour news channel in the Arab world" (Al Arabiya n.d.), cites "observers" as stating that al-Sir is "trusted implicitly" by Uthman al-Mirghani, who "prefers to lead from 'behind the scenes'" (Al Arabiya 31 Mar. 2010). According to PHW, "reports in September 2014 indicated that Hatim al-Sir had been chosen to succeed al-Mirghani as party leader" (PHW 2015, 1393).

Without providing further detail, PHW indicates that in 2007, Ali Mahmoud Hassanein was the "Deputy Secretary General" (PHW 2015, 1393). The same source further lists the following persons as leaders in the DUP: Dr. Ahmad al-Sayid Hamad and Ali Ahmed al-Sayyed (PHW 2015, 1393). Further and corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

4. Activities

In January 2014, President Bashir called for a national dialogue among political parties and actors in the country (Al Jazeera 21 Jan. 2015; BBC 13 Apr. 2015). In September 2015, SUNA cites DUP "Deputy Secretary Ahmed Bilal" as affirming that, the DUP will play a key role in the national dialogue (SUNA 30 Sept. 2015). In contrast, an October 2015 Sudan Tribune article indicates that the DUP is divided over the national dialogue; Mohamed al-Hassan al-Mirghani held a meeting for the "national DUP dialogue committee," which supported the national dialogue process, but a "competing statement" was released by DUP spokesman Ibrahim al-Mirghani claiming that the party was not involved in the dialogue and that "the DUP chairman [al-Mirghani] will not be part of it" (Sudan Tribune 6 Oct. 2015).

According to sources, the main opposition parties boycotted the 2015 elections in Sudan (Freedom House 2016; AI 24 Feb. 2016). However, the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) indicates that the 2015 elections were boycotted by all mainstream political parties, except the DUP (FIDH 12 Apr. 2015). Similarly, sources report that the DUP participated (Reuters 13 April 2015; BBC 11 Apr. 2015). The Sudan Tribune states however that "dissidents" within the DUP opposed their party's participation (Sudan Tribune 24 Oct. 2015). Media sources note that 25 seats in the National Assembly were won by the DUP led by al-Mirghani (Sudan Tribune 27 Apr. 2015) or by the DUP Original (Xinhua News Agency 27 Apr. 2015). Sources further report that 15 seats were won by the DUP (Xinhua News Agency 27 Apr. 2015) or by the DUP led by al-Digair (Sudan Tribune 27 Apr. 2015).

A September 2015 Sudan Tribune report indicates that Ali Ahmed al-Sayed, "a leading figure" of the DUP, headed a legal defence team for four members of the Sudanese opposition group Reform Now Movement who were accused of "disturbing public peace" (Sudan Tribune 3 Sept. 2015). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

In February 2016, the Sudan Tribune reported that Mohamad al-Hassan al-Mirghani was seeking input from DUP "leaders and sectors" about whether to withdraw from the government, after he had threatened to withdraw over concerns that he was not sufficiently involved in the government’s activities (Sudan Tribune 19...
Feb. 2016). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

In a November 2016 article, Radio Dabanga, a Netherlands-based news radio station focused on Darfur (Radio Dabanga n.d.), states that the DUP "refused" the government’s decision to raise fuel and electricity prices (Radio Dabanga 7 Nov. 2016). A November 2016 Sudan Tribune article similarly indicates that the DUP "criticized" the measures, and "described them as the first nail in the coffin of the national dialogue" (Sudan Tribune 9 Nov. 2016). According to Radio Dabanga, a "three day civil strike" was held in Khartoum to protest the price increases from 27 to 29 November 2016 (Radio Dabanga 11 Dec. 2016). Similarly, the Sudan Tribune reports that there was a "three-day protest against the austerity measures between 27 and 29 November" (Sudan Tribune 10 Dec. 2016). A 26 November 2016 Sudan Tribune article cites a "statement from the Politburo" of the DUP as indicating that the party issued a decision to all the "DUP’s bodies and sectors to join the civil disobedience" (Sudan Tribune 26 Nov. 2016).

Sources report that groups of activists called for civil disobedience for 19 December 2016 (Sudan Tribune 10 Dec. 2016; Radio Dabanga 11 Dec. 2016). According to the Sudan Tribune, opposition groups including the DUP expressed support for the action, and "called upon their affiliates to play an active role in the strike" (Sudan Tribune 10 Dec. 2016). Similarly, Radio Dabanga states that the DUP "has urged 'all its members in all states of Sudan' to join the 19 December action" (Radio Dabanga 11 Dec. 2016). The same source indicates that the DUP "called for the formation of 'a unified centre' for the coordination of the action 'in preparation of a peaceful intifada to topple the regime'" (Radio Dabanga 11 Dec. 2016). Radio Dabanga further reports that the 19 December 2016 "one-day civil disobedience general strike" received "significant support" (Radio Dabanga 21 Dec. 2016). However, the BBC reported that on 19 December that it "appear[ed] as though fewer people [were] heading the call to stay at home" than in November (BBC 19 Dec. 2016).

According to the Sudan Tribune, the DUP's leader Uthman al-Mirghani formed a liaison committee in January 2017 to negotiate directly with the ruling NCP "arrangements for the new era in the country," and directed them to "lay out demands for stopping the war, enhancing the democratic transition, allowing freedoms, promoting human rights, reforming the economic situation and establishing balanced foreign relations" (Sudan Tribune 8 Jan. 2017). Similarly, SUNA reports that Muhammad Uthman al-Mirghani established a "committee for communicating with other political parties," and from this committee, a sub-committee was established to "negotiate with the [NCP] over arrangements of the new stage for the country" (SUNA 8 Jan. 2017).

5. Treatment by Authorities

The US Department of State's 2015 *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2015* states that "the government continued to deny permission to Islamic orders associated with opposition political parties, particularly the Ansar (Umma Party) and Khatmiya (Democratic Unionist Party) to hold large gatherings in public spaces" (US 13 Apr. 2016, 46). The same source indicates that agents of the government "occasionally attended opposition meetings, disrupted opposition rallies, or summoned participants to security headquarters for questioning after meetings" (US 13 Apr. 2016, 46).

Radio Dabanga reports that the headquarters of the DUP in Khartoum, as well as those of the Sudanese Communist Party in Khartoum and the National Umma Party in Omdurman, were surrounded by security forces during the April 2015 elections (Radio Dabanga 16 Apr. 2015). Further and corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

Sources report that the ruling government allocated 30 percent of cabinet positions after the 2015 elections to other parties that had participated in the elections, including the DUP (Radio Dabanga 7 June 2015; Sudan Tribune 7 June 2015).

SUDO UK, a UK-based organization "working with partners to monitor and document human rights abuses" (SUDO UK n.d.), reported that on 21 March 2016, two students were injured when a group of student NCP members attacked DUP student members at Al-Qadarif University (SUDO UK 26 Apr. 2016). Further and corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

Sources report that opposition members were arrested as part of the government's response to civil disobedience actions during three days in November 2016 (BBC 19 Dec. 2016; Sudan Tribune 18 Dec. 2016).
Arrests as a result of further civil disobedience on December 19, 2016 were also reported (Radio Dabanga 21 Dec. 2016; ACJPS 16 Jan. 2017). On 16 January 2017, the African Centre for Justice and Peace Studies (ACJPS), a non-profit organization “dedicated to creating a Sudan committed to all human rights, the rule of law and peace” whose work includes a human rights monitoring program (ACJPS n.d.), reports that it “was aware that eleven political opposition party members were arrested during the November and December civil disobedience campaign,” including two DUP members: Al Ajebo Mahmoud (arrested 23 December 2016) and Al Muiz Omer Hadra (arrested 25 December 2016) (ACJPS 16 Jan. 2017). According to the same source, they are “being held in incommunicado detention without charge or access to their families and lawyers” (ACJPS 16 Jan. 2017). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

Note

[1] The Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) was "originally the political wing of the SPLA [Sudan People's Liberation Army], an insurgency that waged war for 22 years against the Khartoum-based government of Sudan, before joining the national government in a 2005 peace deal that also made SPLM the ruling party in Southern Sudan" (Sudane Tribune n.d.a).

References


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Additional Sources Consulted

Internet sites, including: AllAfrica; BBC; Bertelsmann Stiftung Transformation Index; eci.net; Human Rights Watch; IRIN; Transparency International; UN – Refworld, ReliefWeb.

Tips on how to use this search engine.