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[Home](#)

> [Research Program](#)

> Responses to Information Requests

Responses to Information Requests

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17 May 2016

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Sudan: Information on the Broad National Front (BNF), including its establishment, leadership, structure, membership requirements, purpose and mandate, areas of operation, and perception and treatment by authorities (2009-June 2016)

Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

1. Establishment

Sources indicate that the BNF [also known as the Broad National Movement (BNM) (Endole [2016])] was established in October 2010 (Sudan Tribune 2 Dec. 2010; ISS 8 Jan. 2011; *Africa Confidential* 22 Oct. 2010). The Sudan Tribune, a non-profit Paris-based news website that aims to "promote plural information, democratic and free debate on Sudan" (Sudan Tribune n.d.), describes the BNF as "a broad coalition of different Sudanese political grouping[s]" (Sudan Tribune 3 Dec. 2010) and "a political forum gathering groups and individuals opposed to the regime" (Sudan Tribune 15 Sept. 2013).

2. Leadership

Several sources report that Ali Mahmoud Hassanein is the leader of the BNF (Sudan Tribune 15 Sept. 2013; ISS 8 Jan. 2011, 4; Radio Dabanga 2 Jan. 2012). Sources indicate that Hassanein is also the Deputy Chairman of the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) (ibid. 7 Dec. 2015; EIU 1 Dec. 2011; *Asharq al-Awsat* 7 Oct. 2010). He is described as a "prominent" (ibid.) or "veteran" opposition leader (Sudan Tribune 15 Sept. 2013). According to sources, there was a break in relations between Hassanein and the DUP leader al-Mirghani [al-Mirghani], due to the latter cooperating with the ruling National Congress Party (NCP) (Radio Dabanga 7 Dec. 2015; Sudan Tribune 6 Mar. 2015). In a telephone interview with the Research Directorate, a fellow at the Rift Valley Institute [1], who specializes in Sudan, stated that Hassanein leads a faction of the DUP, but that it is not a large faction and "would not be among the top 10 opposition groups in Sudan" (Fellow 4 May 2016).

In a 2010 interview with *Asharq Al-Awsat*, a pan-Arab daily newspaper published in 14 cities on 4 continents (*Asharq Al-Awsat* n.d.), Hassanein reportedly indicated that he relocated to London, UK, following his arrest by al-Bashir's security forces in 2009 and subsequent threats received from Sudanese security officials (ibid. 7 Oct. 2010). According to a 2015 article by the Sudan Tribune, Hassanein is in "self-imposed exile" (6 Mar. 2015). IHS Global Insight notes that Hassanein is outspoken on a number of issues, such as freedom of the press and security force abuses (31 Dec. 2008). The Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) similarly describes him as "a veteran campaigner for democracy and human rights" (EIU 1 Dec. 2011). According to Radio Dabanga, a "radio station by Darfuris for Darfuris" airing "news and information broadcasts" (n.d.), he has spoken out against the government carrying out political assassinations, arresting political opponents, and "torturing and murdering them in prison" (2 Jan. 2012).

The Sudan Tribune reports that Ahmed Hadra is a "leading figure" of the BNF (13 June 2014). Further and corroborating information about Hadra could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

According to company information about the BNM [see section 5] in the UK, Hassanein is the Director and Hisham Alsir Ahmed is the Company Secretary (Endole [2016]). El Tayeb Alzain Hamdan was reportedly the former Company Secretary, but resigned in August 2015 (ibid.).

The Sudan Tribune reported in 2013 on a BNF delegation who met with the French ministry of foreign affairs, and others, in Paris (Sudan Tribune 15 Sept. 2013). According to the same source, in addition to Hassanein, the BNF delegation included Mohamed Abu Amna, "a leading member of a faction of the Beja Congress opposed to the peace agreement of October 2006" [2], as well as Suhair Sharraf, Abdel Hamid Khaled and Hashim Alsir (ibid.). Further information about the roles these individuals play in the BNF could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

3. Affiliates, Structure and Membership Process

An article in *Africa Confidential* indicates that the BNF has support from Darfur groups, including the Justice and Equality Movement (*Africa Confidential* 22 Oct. 2010). The same source states that the BNF was inviting support "on an individual basis, thereby excluding the political parties" (ibid.). However, according to the Sudan Tribune, the leader of the Al-Wasat Islamic Party stated that his party is part of the BNF (2 Oct. 2014).

In correspondence with the Research Directorate, a professor of English at Smith College in Massachusetts, US, who has researched and written extensively on Sudan, including publishing two books on the genocide in Darfur and numerous newspaper and journal articles, stated that while the BNF is "nominally" a political coalition, "in fact it is an internal DUP quarrel" between Hassanein and the Mirghanis (al-Mirghani and his son) (Professor 6 May 2016). The RVI Fellow expressed the opinion that, beyond the DUP faction led by Hassanein, support for the BNF is "mainly a close group of people around the leader" (Fellow 4 May 2016). In correspondence with the Research Directorate, a Senior Sudan Analyst with the Enough Project [3], who is a native of Darfur and has over 20 years of experience working on issues of human rights and democracy in Sudan, stated the following about the BNF:

[t]his is a coalition of individuals and groups that split from the original DUP, and to my knowledge the party is very small. There seems to be no parties other than those factions of the DUP. (Senior Sudan Analyst 10 May 2016)

Concerning the structure of the BNF, the same source indicated that the work of the BNF "is done by the leader and a handful of assistants named to offices that are not active, and in essence do not exist" (ibid.). Further information about the structure of the BNF could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

The RVI Fellow expressed the opinion that it is "unlikely that the BNF has a formal membership process" (Fellow 4 May 2016). He stated that the party's recruitment processes likely occur "through a network of people" (ibid.). According to the Senior Sudan Analyst, none of the Sudanese parties have a "'formal membership' process" like parties in democratic countries (10 May 2016). Similarly, the RVI Fellow stated that "[p]arty membership in Sudan is not strict" (4 May 2016). The Professor was also not aware of any formal membership process to join the BNF (6 May 2016).

The RVI Fellow expressed the opinion that it is "unlikely" that the BNF issues membership cards and was unaware of any parties other than the ruling party issuing membership cards (Fellow 4 May 2016). The Professor and the Senior Sudan Analyst were likewise unaware of the BNF issuing membership cards (Professor 6 May 2016; Senior Sudan Analyst 10 May 2016).

4. Purpose and Objectives

Sources indicate that the purpose of the BNF is to overthrow the al-Bashir government (*Asharq al-Awsat* 7 Oct. 2010; *Africa Confidential* 22 Oct. 2010; Sudan Tribune 15 Sept. 2013).

The Sudan Tribune notes that the BNF is against having any dialogue with the NCP and has called for a "secular federal state" divided into six regions (ibid.). According to the Fellow, the BNF has spoken against the secession of South Sudan (Fellow 4 May 2016).

5. Areas of Operation

The BNF was reportedly incorporated in the UK on 31 January 2011 (United Kingdom n.d.; Endole [2016]) and changed its name to the Broad National Movement (BNM) in February 2015 (ibid.). Its address is listed as 1 Berkeley Square, London W1J 6EA (ibid.; United Kingdom n.d.). According to the Senior Sudan Analyst, the BNF has a presence in the US in the form of volunteer "party operatives" and a "virtual office" (10 May 2016). In his 2010 interview with *Asharq al-Awsat*, Hassanein states that he was in the US to gain support for the BNF (7 Oct. 2010).

The Senior Sudan Analyst stated that it is unlikely that the BNF has any offices in Sudan because "the political space in Sudan is curtailed" (10 May 2016). According to the Fellow, the faction of the DUP led by Hassanein has a presence in Sudan and Hassanein has supporters there, but it is not a large group (4 May 2016). The Professor stated that he was unaware of "an active BNF presence inside Sudan" and had no knowledge of the party operating "anywhere in Sudan in a consequential way, either militarily or politically" (6 May 2016).

6. Activities

Africa Confidential reports that the BNF planned to "launch itself" in October 2010 (22 Oct. 2010). According to the Sudan Tribune, the BNF was preparing to hold a second convention in Cairo in August 2014, with the slogan "'unity of the opposition to overthrow the regime and not to engage in dialogue with it,'" but Egyptian officials prevented the convention from taking place (17 Aug. 2014).

Without providing details, the Fellow stated that the BNF has issued "statements" and been involved in "advocacy work" (4 May 2016). According to *Asharq al-Awsat*, Hassanein has "agreed with some US groups that al-Bashir should surrender to the International Criminal Court (ICC), which has accused al-Bashir of committing war crimes and genocide in Darfur" (7 Oct. 2010). Radio Dabanga reports that in February 2013, the BNF, along with the Sudanese Revolutionary Front (SRF) [Sudan's primary military opposition (Professor 6 May 2016)] and the National Consensus Forces, demanded an investigation after security forces and students supporting the ruling party "invaded the campus of the University of Khartoum," where they allegedly beat and arrested "dozens" of students and burned 41 dormitories (Radio Dabanga 3 Feb. 2013). According to the same source, in 2013, Hassanein called for the ICC to arrest General El Sir Bashir Hussein for "'war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide'" after the General made a speech directing security forces to open fire on demonstrators in South Darfur (ibid. 14 Oct. 2013).

According to the Senior Sudan Analyst, most of the activities of the BNF abroad are "demonstrations in front of embassies or international organizations to draw attention [to] causes like human rights and democracy in Sudan" (Senior Sudan Analyst 10 May 2016). Regarding BNF activities within Sudan, the same source stated that "it is hard for such a small party to operate, but student members of the party might demonstrate in the party's name as part of the student protests that take place periodically" (ibid.). Concerning the BNF's involvement with protests within Sudan, the Fellow indicated that the BNF has called for protests, but he was unsure if they have been involved in organizing protests (Fellow 4 May 2016). The same source noted that many of the anti-government protests in Sudan are carried out by students and that it is possible that affiliates of the BNF have been involved in those (ibid.).

7. Treatment of BNF Leaders and Members by Authorities

Sources indicate that Hassanein was arrested by Sudanese security forces in December 2008 (Human Rights Watch 18 Feb. 2009, 9; IHS Global Insight 31 Dec. 2008), due to "his public comments in support of the ... ICC prosecutors' attempts to seek an arrest warrant for the country's president" (ibid.). According to Human Rights Watch, he was "interrogated at length" about his support of the ICC and "threatened with death should he speak out again" (18 Feb. 2009, 9). In the interview with *Asharq al-Awsat*, Hassanein stated that he was arrested by al-Bashir's security forces in 2009 because of his opposition to the regime and his position on the ICC, and that security forces "threatened to kill me if I continued my political stand" (7 Oct. 2010). According to *Africa Confidential*, Hassanein has a history of being harassed and imprisoned by the NCP "for his outspoken demands for democracy and justice" (22 Oct. 2010). According to the Professor,

[t]he BNF is unlikely to be regarded seriously by the Khartoum regime—they face much bigger problems in the political and military opposition. That said, I doubt very much that Hassanein could travel to Sudan without immediately attracting the attention of the National Intelligence and Security Services. He faces arrest, imprisonment and possible torture. (6 May 2016)

In a June 2014 article about the arrest of activists following a protest in Khartoum, the Sudan Tribune reports that a BNF leader, Ahmed Hadra, was arrested by the National Intelligence and Security Services (NISS) from his home (13 June 2014). Specific incidents of other BNF leaders or members being subject to arrest by security forces could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

Concerning the treatment of BNF members, the Fellow expressed the following opinion:

I wouldn't exclude the possibility that the authorities have been oppressive towards BNF members. It is possible that people who are members or who support this group have faced oppression [from] Sudanese authorities, particularly if they were involved in organizing or holding protests. It is possible that they have been subject to aggressive behaviour, including violence, arrest and/or detention. (4 May 2016)

According to the Senior Sudan Analyst,

[t]he members of the BNF were treated harshly by the Sudanese authorities because their leader is outspoken and he publicly called for the end to this regime. There were reports that some members were detained and some were even tortured by the Security Services of the Government of Sudan. (10 May 2016)

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.

Notes

[1] The Rift Valley Institute (RVI) is an NGO operating in seven countries in Eastern and Central Africa with the aim "to advance useful knowledge of the region and its diverse communities, bringing a better understanding of local realities to bear on social and political action" (RVI n.d.).

[2] There was a peace agreement signed between the government of Sudan and the Eastern Front [a "rebel alliance consisting of the Beja, the Rashaida Free Lions, and the Democratic Party of Eastern Sudan" (Radio Dabanga 31 May 2015)] on 14 October 2006 (UN 16 Oct. 2006).

[3] The Enough Project is based in Washington, DC with the aim of countering "rights-abusing armed groups and violent kleptocratic regimes" (Enough Project n.d.). The Project "conducts field research in conflict zones, develops and advocates for policy recommendations, supports social movements in affected countries, and mobilizes public campaigns" (ibid.).

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[Top of Page](#)

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