

## Responses to Information Requests

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20 July 2012

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Sudan: The Umma (or Oma) party, including its mandate, structure, leaders, activities; treatment of its members  
Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

### 1. Background

The Umma Party (UP) was founded in 1945 (*PHW* 2012, 1357; UP n.d.a; Gurtong n.d.a). According to the 2012 edition of the *Political Handbook of the World (PHW)*, the party's main supporters are Ansar Muslims in the provinces of White Nile, western Darfur, and Kordofan (1357). Similarly, the *US International Religious Freedom Report July-December 2010* notes that the UP is "closely connected with Arab followers of the Ansar sect" (US 13 Sept. 2011, 2, 3). *US Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2011* indicates that the UP is not "officially registered with the government" (US 24 May 2012, 25).

According to the UP's official website, the party began as an alliance between the Ansar, some tribal chiefs and Sufi sects, and "graduates" promoting the independence of Sudan (UP n.d.a). The UP advocated for the repeal of sharia law in Sudan (*PHW* 2012, 1357). The party's website states that "[c]urrently the Umma Party is championing the cause of a negotiated Just Peace, and Democratic Transformation and so putting an end to the War and to Totalitarianism" (UP n.d.b). According to Gurtong Trust - Peace and Media Project (Gurtong), a Kenyan and south Sudanese independent, non-profit media project supported by the Swiss Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Open Society Institute (Gurtong 12 Aug. 2009), the principles of the UP are "'an Islam that is based on rationality, humanism, science, plurality,' [and a] 'respect of all faiths'" (Gurtong n.d.a). The party also is mainly focused on solving the crisis in Darfur (*ibid.*; Al Jazeera 7 Apr. 2010). The UP is the main opposition party to the current government in Sudan (*ibid.*; Bloomberg 31 Jan. 2012).

### 2. UP Leaders

The official website of the UP lists the following as its leaders: Imam Al Sadig [or Sadiq] AlMahdi (President); Fadlalla Burma (Vice President); Nasreldin Al Mahdi (Second Vice President); Siidig El Nour (Secretary General); Abdelrahman Al Ghali (Deputy Secretary General); Ali Geilob (Chairman of the Central Committee); Zeinab Ali (Rapporteur of Central Committee); EISheikh Mahjoub (President of the Monitor and Control Commission); Sarah Nugdallah (Chairwomen of Politburo); Mohammed Al Mahdi (Deputy Chairperson of Politburo); Abdelrahman Dosa (Rapporteur of Politburo); and Naeema Ajabna (Deputy Rapporteur of Politburo) (UP n.d.c).

### 3. UP Activity between 1986 and 2000

In 1986, UP leader Imam Al Sadig Al Mahdi became prime minister after the party won the largest number of seats in parliament; the party was overthrown in 1989 in a military coup (Gurtong n.d.a). The *Political Handbook of the World* also noted that UP leaders Mahdi and Idris al-Banna were arrested in June 1989 after a military coup (2012, 1357). Similarly, Gurtong notes that Mahdi was arrested in 1989 after a military coup and released from prison in 1991 (Gurtong n.d.a). Banna was sentenced to 40 years in prison for corruption (*PHW* 2012, 1357). For his part, after being released from prison, Mahdi was placed under house arrest between January 1989 and May 1991 (*ibid.*). According to a US Library of Congress country report on Sudan sponsored by the US Department of the Army (US n.d.), while Mahdi was kept under arrest, the UP allied itself with the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) and other government opposition parties (US 1991). Similarly, the *Political Handbook of the World* indicates that in 1991, the UP aligned with the SPLM, which wanted to overthrow the government, end the civil war, and advocated for a multiparty, secular democracy; this caused division in the UP (2012, 1357).

In 1994, the SPLM and UP signed an agreement recognizing that South Sudan had a right to hold a referendum regarding its independence (Gurtong n.d.a). Mahdi was arrested again in June 1994, charged with "plotting against the government," and again in May 1995 for three months; in December 1996 he "fled" to Asmara, Eritrea (*PHW* 2012, 1357).

In November 1999, Mahdi reached an agreement with the government called the "Call of the Homeland Accord," which offered a new pluralistic constitution and a referendum for the south to become independent (*ibid.*). In 2000, Mahdi ordered the Umma militia to cease fire (*ibid.*). In November 2000, Mahdi returned to Sudan after a four year exile in Egypt, but the UP boycotted the presidential elections in December because they wanted to wait for a "national reconciliation" (*ibid.*).

In 2000, the UP split into the following factions: the Umma Reform and Renewal Party (URRP), led by Mubarak al-Fadil al-Mahdi; the Umma General Leadership party, also known as the Umma National Party (UP), led by Dr. al-Sadiq al-Hadi al-Mahdi; the Federal Umma Party, led by Ahmed Babiker Nahar (ibid.).

#### 4. Factions

##### 4.1 Umma Reform and Renewal Party (URRP)

Sources indicate that the Umma Reform and Renewal Party (URRP) was officially formed in 2002 and led by Mubarak Al Fadil Al Mahdi (Gurtong n.d.b; Al Jazeera 7 Apr. 2010). According to Gurtong, in 2002 the URRP joined the government; Fadil became assistant president and other URRP members secured government positions, with the party's deputy chairman Al-Zahawi Ibrahim Malik taking the position of information minister (ibid.). The *Sudan Tribune* states that Fadil was appointed as the presidential adviser for economic affairs in 2002 (3 Jan. 2011). Similarly, the *Political Handbook of the World* notes that in August 2002, as well as in 2005, members of the URRP accepted ministerial positions (2012, 1357). Fadil was removed from his position in 2004 (Gurtong n.d.b; *Sudan Tribune* 3 Jan. 2011) for criticizing government policies in Darfur and Eastern Sudan (Gurtong n.d.b). In July 2007, Fadil and 27 other party leaders were arrested for "plotting to overthrow the government," but Fadil was later released (*PHW* 2012, 1357). Similarly, Gurtong indicates that in 2007 Fadil, URRP secretary general Abdel Jalil Basha, and other party members were imprisoned for a number of months because they were allegedly planning a "coup" (Gurtong n.d.b). The *Sudan Tribune* reports that Fadil was released after the information obtained from the government turned out to be false (3 Jan. 2011).

According to Gurtong and Al Jazeera, the URRP supported the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, which settled the war in the South, and promoted a more decentralized system of federalism in the North through restructuring it into five regions (Gurtong n.d.b; Al Jazeera 7 Apr. 2010).

The party boycotted the 2010 presidential elections, but gained two seats in the assembly (*PHW* 2012, 1357). The International Republican Institute (IRI), an organization that promotes democracy in "countries important to US interests" (IRI n.d.b), also indicates in a summary on April 2010 elections in Sudan that opposition parties had threatened to boycott the 2010 elections, but that information regarding boycotts by parties were changing "daily" (IRI n.d.a).

The *Sudan Tribune* reports that in January 2011 Fadil announced the dissolution and reintegration of the URRP back to the UP, led by Mahdi (3 Jan. 2011).

##### 4.2 Islamic Umma Party

According to the *Political Handbook of the World*, the Islamic Umma Party (IUP) separated from UP in 1985 and became an official political party in April 1999; the leader of the IUP is Wali al-Din al-Hadi al-Mahdi (2012, 1357). The party advocates for Sharia law as the only law (ibid.).

##### 4.3 Federal Umma Party

In the 2010 presidential elections, the Federal Umma Party obtained three assembly seats and Nahar received a cabinet position (*PHW* 2012, 1358).

#### 5. UP Activity between 2010 and 2012

In 2010, the National Umma Party nominated Mahdi as its presidential candidate, but withdrew from the elections in protest of "electoral irregularities;" Mahdi placed fifth in the election results with less than one percent of the votes; the party gained one assembly seat (*PHW* 2012, 1357). In reference to the 2010 elections, the *Human Rights Watch World Report 2011* noted that "international and domestic observers reported widespread technical irregularities such as multiple voting, ballot-stuffing, and other acts of fraud" (2011).

According to the *Sudan Tribune*, in December 2010, UP leader Mahdi demanded the following changes and commitments of the ruling National Congress Party (NCP):

to form a national government that would write a new constitution, conduct new general elections that are fair and free, resolve the Darfur conflict, craft a brotherhood agreement with the south should it opt for independence in the referendum, allowing for unrestricted political environment, tackle economic crisis and deals with the International Criminal Court (ICC) row. (24 Jan. 2011)

A BBC news article explains that UP asked for a "new body to oversee the National Electoral Commission," along with an end to repressive security laws and "fair access to state media [and] caps on campaign spending" (2 Apr. 2010). According to the *Sudan Tribune*, in April 2011 the UP supported the idea of the establishment of regional authority and also rejected the April elections, asking for the formation of a national government (22 Apr. 2011). The April 2010 results, in which the NCP was victorious, are endorsed by election observers and the international community (*Sudan Tribune* 26 Sept. 2011).

In January 2012, the *Sudan Tribune* reported that UP leader Mahdi continues a dialogue with the ruling NCP instead of promoting the end of the regime (3 Jan. 2012). According to the news source, the UP declined NCP offers to be part of their new government (*Sudan Tribune* 3 Jan. 2012).

In March 2012, the UP, along with the Sudan Revolutionary Front and the Democratic Unionist Party, formed a committee with the goal to "bring down the regime in Khartoum" (Radio Dabangal 16 Mar. 2012). In April 2012, 23 UP leading figures sent a memo to the *Sudan Tribune*, stating that the UP's positional "vagueness" towards the current regime, their "lack of political and organizational efficiency and divisions have paralyzed the opposition party" (*Sudan Tribune* 5 Apr. 2012).

In May 2012, Mahdi's daughter announced that the UP was working with the other opposition parties to improve the performance of their alliance (*Sudan Tribune* 23 May 2012). On 4 July 2012, the UP and the rest of the opposition parties signed the Democratic Alternative Charter, which, after the fall of the current regime, calls for a constitution based on a civil democratic state, equal citizenship rights, religious freedom, respect for diversity, and setting up safeguards against interference of religion in politics (*ibid.* 6 July 2012). The UP leader also declared that he is promoting political dialogue with the current regime instead of violence (*Sudan Tribune* 23 May 2012).

## 6. Treatment of Members 2010 - 2012

US *Country Reports 2011* indicates that the government of Sudan denies permission to Islamic orders that are linked with political parties, such as the Anwar, which are UP affiliated, to gather in public places; even though opposition rallies were held on private property, security agents continued to disrupt the rallies and often questioned participants after meetings at their headquarters (US 24 May 2012, 25).

The *Sudan Tribune* reports that in December 2010, police used tear gas and beat members of the UP as they were leaving the party's headquarters to go to prayer (27 Dec. 2010). The total number of people injured during the police attack was unknown (*Sudan Tribune* 27 Dec. 2010). The police also reportedly stated that the UP members blocked the street, "refused to clear it," and then threw stones, causing the riot police to interfere; the police reported that five UP members and one police officer were then injured as a result (*ibid.*). In a police statement issued later, the Police Forces indicated that they had filed a legal complaint against the "illegal assemblers" (Sudan News Agency 30 Dec. 2010).

In a public statement, Amnesty International (AI) notes that on 21 October 2011, in Khartoum, the National Intelligence and Security Services (NISS) raided a meeting of a number of political parties, including UP members (11 Nov. 2011). More than 10 people were detained and some reported that they had been tortured for 15 days (*ibid.*). One UP member reported that he received verbal abuse, was flogged and kicked in the eye by one of the NISS (*ibid.*). Human Rights Watch called for the Sudanese government to end its "clampdown on opposition party members and critics of the government" (21 Sept. 2011).

At the end of January 2012, Bloomberg media site published an article reporting that one UP member was arrested on 27 January 2012 for organizing a protest supporting the people displaced by the Merowe hydroelectric dam; the UP member noted that in from November 2011 to January 2012, there have been approximately 20 UP members arrested (Bloomberg 31 Jan. 2012). The article also notes that four more UP members were arrested on 30 January 2012 (*ibid.*).

In April 2012 former URRP leader Fadil was arrested by the NISS, which interrogated him, accused him of supporting an armed uprising, and questioned him on the situation inside the UP; he was released the same day but was asked to return to the NISS (*Sudan Tribune* 12 Apr. 2012).

Human Rights Watch reports that security forces have been using "excessive force" and arrested numerous peaceful protesters during the youth-led protests, which started on 16 June 2012 and are in response to government austerity measures (Human Rights Watch 26 June 2012), including those not directly related to the protests, such as UP members (*ibid.* 11 July 2012). The organization adds that many of the arrested were not released for days and that they were interrogated and reportedly victim of "ill-treatment" and "torture" (*ibid.*). Another Human Rights Watch article notes that on 20 June 2012 "police and security forces beat protesters gathered outside the Umma political party headquarters in Omdurman and shot a rubber bullet into the crowd," injuring one protester (*ibid.* 26 June 2012).

In the beginning of July 2012, an anti-regime protest of the UP's Ansar religious sect led by Mahdi in Omdurman was interrupted by police (*Sudan Tribune* 2 July 2012). During the eight hour protest, the police reportedly threw tear gas inside the mosque, which was full of worshippers, and used batons and rubber bullets to disperse approximately 300 protesters (*ibid.*). Protesters hurled rocks at security forces, and undercover security agents were allegedly being violent toward the protesters, beating anyone with a cellphone (*ibid.*). Similarly, according to Al Jazeera, in the context of anti-regime protests that took place in the city of Omdurman in early July 2012, rights groups reported that the police have "'attacked'" demonstrators with tear gas and rubber bullets, some of which were identified as members or supporters of the Umma Party (6 July 2012). *The New York Times* also reports a clash that took place between anti-government protesters and police in Omdurman on 6 July 2012 (6 July 2012). On 17 July 2012, Reuters reported that people that had participated in anti-government demonstrations since mid-June 2012 were still being detained. In June 2012, Canada's Foreign Affairs Minister expressed concerned at the "crackdown on protests in Sudan" (Canada 29 June 2012).

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.

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**Internet sites, including:** Additional Sources Consulted Internet sites, including: eci.net; UN Refworld.

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