

Statement of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army on the Occasion of the Signing and Depositing to Geneva Call Deed of Commitment to Ban Landmines

Delivered by CDR/ NHIAL DENG NHIAL

Chairman of the SPLM/A Commission for External Relations, Information and Humanitarian Affairs.

Genève - 4 October 2001

Mr. Robert HENSLER,
Chancelier d'Etat of the Republic and Canton of Geneva,

Madame Elisabeth Reusse-Decrey,
President of Geneva Call
President of the Parliament of the Republic and Canton of Geneva,

Ladies and gentlemen,

I stand here before you this very morning on behalf of Dr. John Garang de Mabior, the Chairman and Commander-in-Chief of SPLM/SPLA, to sign and deposit our DEED of COMMITMENT for total ban on the use of landmines. Indeed, it is his wish to have been here today, had it not been for reasons beyond our control.

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is worth knowing that the SPLM/SPLA--referred to below as the MOVEMENT-- is a non-state actor which embraces a political, military, humanitarian and an emerging civil authority and civil society, in an area as big as the physical sizes of France and Belgium put together. It is leading a struggle against domination and oppression that has cost our people two million dead and over four and half million people displaced internally and externally. It is in the midst of such a turbulent sea of conflict and unequalled deprivation that the SPLM/SPLA endeavoured, and still endeavours, to address basic humanitarian concerns. Thanks to all those who extended their hands to us at the time of our dire need. With the reciprocal concern of many hands and hearts of the international community, we were able to achieve the following:

- An unprecedented tripartite agreement between us, the UN and the government of the Sudan, which came to be known as OLS (Operation Life-line Sudan) in 1989, and which set the ground rules thereof;
- Formulation of a memorandum of understanding to regulate the relationship between the Movement through its humanitarian wing, the SRRA (The Sudan Relief and Rehabilitation Association) and each and every NGO that wishes to work in the areas under the administration of the Movement.
- With the ICRC, in whose home we are today, we co-operated and co-operate to adhere to the provisions of the Geneva Conventions pertaining to the treatment,

care and release of prisoners of war, (POWs). So far, the SPLM/A has released over 3000 prisoners of war, a gesture the Government of Sudan does not reciprocate.

- SPLM/SPLA signed the Maputo Declaration on the Rights of the Child, and hence our unilateral declaration to demobilize children from the military. And I take this opportunity, to call upon all people of good-will to help us actualize this endeavour, for it is one thing to declare an intention and another to actualize it, and our people stand for the latter. As far as the issue of landmines is concerned, the SPLM/A in 1996, unilaterally, declared a moratorium on the use of landmines before the 1997 Ottawa Convention. Our move was prompted not by the desire to wash our face before the international community, or gain an undue recognition while we do the contrary. No. Our decision was triggered by the simple fact that we are fighting for a peaceful homeland and not a turbulent mine-land. And hence, to actualize our aspirations in liberating a peaceful homeland, we commissioned a humanitarian mine action in the areas under our administration. We did it contrary to what some pessimistic experts cherish, that mine action can only be undertaken at peace times, and portray the impossibility of it taking place in areas controlled by non-state actors. Today, and for the last four and a half years, Operation Save Innocent Lives, (OSIL - Sudan), has been remarkably active in saving innocent lives. It has succeeded in opening up in-lets to remote areas where the needy could be reached. Displaced communities are returning to their homesteads, schools are coming up and markets revived. Having seen such positive results, do we have to wait for a political peace to be declared after which to move to save innocent lives? If it has been possible for the international community to save millions of innocent lives from famine and diseases for the past eleven years during conflict, what then would be the logic of vaccinating a child against polio for it to be maimed or killed a day or moments after by a mine?

That is simply the reason why we are here in Geneva. We are here to deposit our Deed of Commitment to ban the total use of landmines, in response to the humble but historic call of Geneva Call. And as we stand committed to deposit our DEED OF COMMITMENT, we raise our voice to the international community to bring pressure to bear on the government of the Sudan to ratify the Ottawa Convention on the ban on the use of landmines and to allow free access for co-ordinated cross-conflict mine action operations. Indeed, states and their affiliated militia should not be allowed to abuse humanity in the name of sovereignty.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Liberators, freedom fighters and the like are great noble people, but no angels. They are fallible human beings. Given the socio-political situation our Movement was born into, we made mistakes. Nevertheless, we sat in 1994 in a broad-based Convention and analyzed our mistakes objectively and decided to correct them, for we believe that tomorrow must be a better day. Asking to be free is no crime and so is fighting to be free. It is the manner and the means to fight for freedom which are matters that concern our common human family. Having said this, allow me to take this opportunity to appeal to all governments and people of good-will to assist us to achieve these noble goals, as the only foundation upon which to build peace and respect for human rights. Our arms are open to all those who are genuinely willing to help.

Ladies and gentlemen,

To us, Geneva Call is a sober call that surmounts wanton desires of deaf State-actors and engulfs human consciousness without boundaries. And by this principle, we call upon all coalitions against the use of landmines, child soldiers, kidnapping, torture and random use of small arms to join hands with the Geneva Call and engage the non-State actors to respect international humanitarian conventions in the conduct of war. These are challenges which could be over-come with non-state actors if more modest efforts are exerted to engage them through:

- Public education through local initiatives and building appropriate capacities thereof,
- Education of de facto officials of non-state actors,
- Avoiding demonization, naming names and shunning them, but continuing to challenge them to carry out their responsibilities towards the people in the areas they control, the very people they intend to liberate.

The SPLM/A is fully conscious of the fact that although it is a non-state actor, the world has come to expect from it humanitarian standards, approaching if not on a par with those expected of sovereign governments. This constitutes a daunting challenge and a tremendous burden for our Movement, and unless the international community comes to our aid with increased levels of humanitarian assistance, especially in the field of health, education and human resources development, we will not be able to continue to live up to those high expectations.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am pleased and happy to be asked by my leader to stand-in for him. I am very thankful to both the Swiss and Geneva governments and people for their brave understanding by allowing us, we the non-state actors, to have such an international forum in which to interact. My thanks and appreciation to Madame Elisabeth Reusse-Decrey and the entire staff of Geneva Call, for their commendable endeavour and warm hospitality. My special thanks to the Representative of the Republic and Canton of Geneva. Many thanks to you ladies and gentlemen of the media.

Thank you very much