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## The East: Sudan's Sidi Bouzid?

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**A**s the humanitarian crisis in eastern Sudan reaches alarming levels, past allies have banded together again to demand development in impoverished region

**Khartoum** - More than ever, Eastern Sudan seems ready for its revolution "against marginalization."

Locals of the region are once again gathering their weapons. Political leaders in the eastern region assert that they are ready to make choices in order to eliminate the injustices brought upon them, especially with regard to the deteriorating humanitarian condition that has now reached its worst levels.

The deputy leader of the Eastern Sudan opposition group the Beja Congress, Darrar Ahmad Darrar, spoke to Al-Akhbar about the conditions in the region.

Darrar accused the "National Assembly" government of severely marginalizing the eastern region, where the population has little access to water, food and medicine, while they are suffering from famine.

He explained that "the government confiscated the mineral resources, such as gold, which poor citizens used to make their living from, in addition to taking over lots of land."

Currently, the eastern region is represented in the government by Vice President Musa Ahmad Musa (leader of the Beja Congress), Minister of Interior Ibrahim Mahmoud Hamad and two ministers of state.

But the eastern region leaders believe that this quota does not fairly represent the number of residents in eastern Sudan.

They warn that development is carried out on a tribal basis with eastern representatives in the capital directing funds to developmental programs that only benefit the tribes they belong to.

In this regard, Darrar says that "the representation in the central government is a mere ornament. Those appointed in the government care more about the salaries they obtain in Khartoum than [they do about] the region's residents," adding, "The little support they offer is given to the tribes they belong to."

Much in the same way peace in the eastern region was reached through the foreign-sponsored Eastern Sudan Peace Agreement (ESPA), the return of war could come from beyond Sudan's borders.

Unconfirmed reports indicate that "Beja tribes' soldiers present on the Eritrean side of Hamid Mountain" have reorganized their ranks.

Between peace and possible war, the major goal for the leaders of the region is eliminating the marginalization imposed on them.

A number of locals have taken practical steps in that regard by sending about 500 tribe members abroad, to Saudi Arabia and Kuwait particularly, in order to describe the deterioration of the region's humanitarian conditions.

Darrar vows that the region's residents will fight for and gain their own rights.

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“We will turn to organizations and the international community and explain the situation to them. We have documented all marginalization incidents and will report them to the international community.”

He indicates that what the region is suffering from is unprecedented, even when compared to when Sudan was under the rule of former President Jaafar Nimeiry.

A report issued recently by the Japan International Cooperation Agency noted the deterioration in conditions. It indicated that “91 percent of families in the state of Kassala do not have enough food and only 39 percent have access to clean water.”

The average number of deaths among mothers has risen to “1,414 deaths for every 100,000 births, compared to 500 deaths prior to the war.”

Observers believe that tribal conflicts have affected the Eastern Front (a coalition between the Beja gathering and the Rashaida Free Lions organization, which was later dissolved after signing the peace agreement in 2006) and prevented it from pursuing implementation of the ESPA.

Popular discontent boiled over in the form of student protests at the end of October and beginning of November. Clashes with security forces resulted in one death and many injuries.

Observers believe that despite the differences between the vision of the government on the one hand, and leaders of the Eastern Front on the other, the security situation on the ground clearly points to the real possibility of clashes.

However, representatives of the eastern region, who are partners with the “National Assembly,” believe that the eastern agreement is proceeding, even if slowly, towards attaining its goal. They assert that it is in the eastern region's interest to continue its

partnership and presence in power, and argue that this partnership is developing.

Mohammad Mutasem, Secretary-General of the Beja Congress, states that the ESPA is one of the best agreements signed by the national government considering the other crises Sudan faces.

Mutasem explains that there has been progress in the wealth redistribution issue. One agreement has allocated US\$600 million for the eastern region, thus, doubling the amount allocated for construction in the area.

Moreover, Mutasem states that there has been “a reintegration of all forces fighting alongside the Eastern Front in the ranks of the police, and the formation of a higher commission to follow up on the conditions of those laid off.”

Mutasem plays down objections to the extension of Eastern Front delegates' term in power and the calls for the isolation of the leadership headed by Musa Mohamed Ahmed, Amina Darrar and Mabrouk Mubarak Salim.

In the mean time, some have called for the resurrection of the Eastern Front, which was dissolved following the signing of the ESPA, as an official entity.

The three political forces that were born out of the former united front are: The Beja Congress, the Democratic Eastern Party and the Free Lions Party.

In a statement, the organization attempting to recreate the Eastern Front accused the ruling party of “not implementing and dissociating from agreements,” by taking advantage of “the front leaders' weakness and the mechanism for implementing the agreement” to reach its goal.

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Leaders of the new organization have stated that as a result of these conditions, only 20 percent of the ESPA has been implemented.

Moreover, the agreement has not been included in the interim constitution of 2005, but rather left in United Nations care until it expires. The statement announced that the new Eastern Front leaders are opposed to current rescue plans proposed by the government. These leaders have instead called on the Sudanese people, particularly supporters of the Eastern Front, to work peacefully on toppling the national assembly regime.

This article is an edited translation from the Arabic Edition.