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**July 2, 2009**

**Remarks As Prepared by Chargé d’Affaires Robert E. Whitehead**

Independence Day Speech 2009

Your Excellency, the representative of the Government of Sudan, members of the branches of the Governments of Sudan, Ambassadors and members of the diplomatic corps, political party representatives, my countrymen, ladies and gentlemen. *Ahlan wa sahlan*. Greetings and a very warm welcome to the 233<sup>rd</sup> celebration of the Declaration of America’s Independence. I would like to thank all of you for joining us here this evening.

It is a great pleasure to be back in Khartoum and to see so many familiar faces. I first came to the U.S. Embassy in Khartoum from 2004 to 2005 and returned to Sudan the following year as the first U.S. Consul General to Juba. These were exciting times that saw the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in Naivasha in January, 2005 and the subsequent establishment of the Government of National Unity in Khartoum and the Government of Southern Sudan in Juba. These were also turbulent times. The African Union stood up a peacekeeping operation in Darfur in response to the conflict there, and the United Nations began deploying UNMIS in the South. Despite the challenges of that period, I was unfailingly impressed by the warmth and hospitality of the Sudanese population, the physical splendor of this vast country, and the spectacular diversity of its peoples and cultures. It is a great privilege to return to Sudan, this time with my wife Agathe by my side. Both of us are grateful for the warm welcome we have received.

Tonight, I would like to take a few moments to review the state of relations between the United States and Sudan and to describe new initiatives underway between our two countries. I recently returned from Washington where the U.S. President’s Special Envoy to Sudan, General Scott Gration, hosted a Forum that brought together more than 170 representatives of 31 nations and international organizations in support of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement between the North and South as it moves into the final 18 months of implementation. Delegations from the North and the South of Sudan also attended – many of the delegates had participated directly in the CPA negotiation in Naivasha. The Washington discussions focused on remaining steps needed for full implementation of the CPA and the narrowing of remaining differences between the two signatory parties. There was a recommitment of the international community – both those who supported the CPA negotiations at Naivasha and those who have since lent their support to the process – to provide the moral support and the resources to see the CPA to its successful conclusion.

The United States government was gratified by the positive response of our international partners – the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development, the United Nations, the African Union and a host of bilateral nations too numerous to list -- all of which reaffirmed their support for this historic process. We pledged our support for the work of the Assessment and Evaluation Commission as it facilitates CPA implementation, as well as other internal commissions and mechanisms created within the CPA to guide the agreement to its conclusion, and make possible a bright and peaceful future for Sudan and all its peoples.

This vision of a Sudan at peace with itself pertains to Darfur as fully as it does to the rest of the country. Standing with like-minded countries and organizations, the United States will continue to seek a political solution to the six-year old conflict in Darfur. To this end, we support the valuable work of UN/AU Chief Mediator Djibril Bassolé in Darfur and laud the efforts of the Government of Qatar to negotiate a ceasefire at peace talks in Doha. We will continue to work through the Council of Special Envoys, the UN Security Council and other multilateral bodies to help bring this conflict to an end. Above all else, the United States seeks a just and durable peace in Darfur.

I would like to move from the multilateral to the bilateral scope of our relations with Sudan. The recent meetings in Washington concluded with a round of discussions between the visiting Sudanese delegations and senior American officials that aired positions, expressed concerns, and discussed how all sides can best engage together to advance our common interests. This proved a useful exercise, one that reflected back to the historic speech delivered by President Obama in Cairo on June 4. There, he talked about the need for the cycle of suspicion and discord between the United States and the Muslim world to end. As the President so eloquently stated: “All of us share common aspirations -- to live in peace and security, to get an education and to work with dignity; to love our families, our communities, and our God. These things we share. This is the hope of all humanity.” President Obama also noted that since the time of its independence 233 years ago this month, the United States has been shaped by every culture from every end of the Earth, including Sudan. *E pluribus Unum*: “Out of many, one.” This is the motto on the Great Seal of the United States. It is our hope that this historic aspiration to find common ground will guide us in increasing the understanding and cooperation between our countries and in sharing the uniqueness of our common bonds while celebrating our diversity.

Out of respect for the human rights of those attending this reception I will not subject you to a full catalogue of all U.S. assistance programs to Sudan but note that the FY 2008 budget for humanitarian and development funding reached 931 million US dollars, with similar levels projected for coming years. Although less than one-third of this sum went for long-term development projects, we look forward to the day when events in Sudan will permit us to reverse this ratio and invest the majority of our assistance into the long-term development of Sudan’s institutions and infrastructure. The U.S. also provides financial support to both peacekeeping missions in Sudan, but our outreach extends well beyond these forms of assistance, touching also upon cultural and educational exchanges. Tonight we are pleased to have with us distinguished members of the recently formed

Sudanese American Alumni Association. This association includes leaders in many fields who continue to work to bring our two peoples together. We are deeply grateful for their pioneering work. Prestigious exchange and educational programs, such as those in which they have participated, increase our cultural links. They are often the first steps taken in discovering a shared path.

With the opening of our new Embassy in Soba later this year – *Inshallah* – the U.S. Government plans to increase such educational and cultural programs. We hope to restart programs that once existed here, while offering new exchange opportunities and using exciting new technologies to share ideas. I am also pleased to announce that for the first time in more than a decade, our new Embassy will once again be able to provide Sudanese citizens with full visa and other consular services here in Khartoum. In short, the completion of this new Embassy symbolizes the commitment of the United States to expand and deepen its relationship with Sudan. I look forward to welcoming you to our Embassy in the near future and to celebrate next year's 4<sup>th</sup> of July with you in its garden.

When it comes to U.S.-Sudanese relations, I know there is some skepticism on both sides of the Atlantic. In certain quarters, there is lingering mistrust along the banks of the Potomac as well as the Nile. But as President Obama said last month, "if we choose to be bound by the past, we will never move forward." It is up to us to choose our own destiny.

My wish for the United States and Sudan is that we seek common ground and show the world that no matter how great our differences may seem, as President Obama said, "we have the power to make the world we seek, but only if we have the courage to make a new beginning."

In Khartoum, at the confluence of the Nile, divergent currents meet. There is symbolic value in this fact. And it is these same waters that have welcomed me back again.

Thank you all for coming out tonight. Thank you. *Shukran*.