

In the name of allah, the Beneficent, the merciful

A workshop on Darfuri-Darfuri dialogue

Media Communication as strategy for Darfuri – Darfuri dialogue

Preface:-

The Darfur peace agreement was able to address the current crises in Darfur on two levels representing the approach of resolving the current crises in its historical, political, economical and cultural roots: -

1- the level of the conflict between the region and the federal power:

To introduce views for peaceful solutions with agenda for change towards new system and new mechanisms of power and wealth sharing, and security arrangements that will create consensus between the parties of the negotiation.

2-The level of conflict among the components of Darfur society

To introduce views of Darfuri-Darfuri dialogue and to consult and call for the participation all the individuals and groups who could come together for the new beginning to the rehabilitation of the Darfur society. This could be achieved through blessing the peace agreement itself that could be prepared to the base for consensus and the right foundation for the settlement of the crisis, considering the signing of the agreement as a very important step towards bringing about a peaceful, just and lasting political solution to the Darfuri conflict.

Introduction:-

The media and communication experts know what connects the desire of surpassing the current crisis to the various means of media production.

They start their analysis with the fact that the crisis itself has diverse centres that reproduce it. The most complicated of these centres are the contradictory concepts each party of the conflict has in evaluating the crisis and consequently propose the ways of resolving and surpassing it. After the situation moved into an internal armed conflict, a contradictory ideological thesis emerged to the surface. Some groups within the governmental authorities have viewed what happened and what is happening in Darfur as an arm robbery and those who committed it as gangs who must be eliminated physically and morally by using the support available from the various information and security organs. On the other side, the armed movements that took the lead in the rebellion against the government in Darfur didn't understand that the military success alone wouldn't lead to secure their rights. Winning back the rights is a holistic process with continuous stages that include benefiting from the recognition of the other party of the negotiation and proceed to negotiate, besides the benefit of the reconciliation and the integration that follows. Therefore, in the context of resolving a crisis, especially after a long period of incomplete negotiation, with agreement that doesn't includes all the parties, the need becomes pressing for conceptual approximations among the parties and through media in order to come with reformed plans to complete the negotiation and to gain the acceptance of the parties for a sustainable peace.

The possibility of reaching common concepts

In spite the high cost of the war among the parties of the armed conflict in Darfur and the high losses of life and property, the past few years were the crucial period for the truth of Darfur crisis to be introduced. The conflict was defined internationally as an internal armed conflict.

The international community, represented in the security council started to act towards taking the necessary measures in such situations where it usually start by calling the warring parties to a cease-fire and to prepare to sit round a negotiation table so as to resolve the conflict politically. In the case of Darfur, the conflict attracted a wide international interest as the Security Council decided, according to article 39 of the united nation charter, and to paragraph 21 of decision 1556/2004 preamble, that the situation in the Sudan constitutes a threat to the international peace and security and to the stability of the region. The decision came in clear reference to the conflict between the Sudan government, on one side, and the Sudan Liberation Movement and Justice and Equality Movement on the other. The security council emphasised the international community concerns towards what has been taken place in Darfur and took a decision of the possibility of intervening in the Sudan under the paragraph 7 of the United Nation charter .

The Security Council referred the whole case of Darfur crimes under paragraph 7 to the international criminal court in The Hague. According to this and contrary to what took place in South Sudan negotiation in Nairobi, the criminal case was separated from the possibility of peace settlement in the same way the situation in Yugoslavia was treated.

The international interest towards Darfur has increased due to the humanitarian and security situations and after the increase of worries due to the expansion of the conflict regionally and internationally. These developments have affected the Sudanese public opinion which had been denied the true information about the truth of what was happening in Darfur as most of the local coverage of the events were giving wide misleading accounts. As for the government, it confessed of the existence of a political crisis in Darfur worth looking at. This confession came after a wide political, legal and media debate and a fierce war that continued for three years. In spite of the government recognition to the existence of the crisis its attempt to accommodate the crisis met with great obstacles. The stronger current within the government machinery prefers to see the crisis in local terms as tribal elements and as elements that carry on armed looting and arm robbery. Under this interpretation the government resort to out weight the idea that the international conspiracy is the factor that contributed to the escalation of the local conflict until it reached to its international dimensions that are know today.

On another level, although the leaders and the fighters of the two movements that represent the other party in the conflict are from Darfur, each of them represents a current that is independent from the other. The Sudan Liberation Movement, as its leaders confess in words and in field practises, is a continuation of political and military movements originated in Darfur modern history. These movements include the Darfur Front for progress (1965), the Souni military movement that was also active during the sixties of the last century and Daud Bolad movement originated from the Sudan people Liberation Movement (SPLM) in the nineties. The Sudan Liberation Movement (SLM) started under the claim of resisting Darfur political isolation and the economic marginalization and because of its administrative and security situation. To achieve this objectives, the SLM didn't see any reason why it shouldn't proceed to form coalition with other regional entities so as to build a new

and just centre of power. The Justice and Equality Movement, in spite of its recognition of Darfur marginalization it starts off from an ideological centre that see Darfur as a case connected with other cases.

It is worth noticing that the leaders of Justice and Equality Movement see themselves responsible for correcting the mistakes of the Central Islamic Government that didn't only fail to achieve justice for all the regions but acted also in favour of the Northern region leaving other regions including Darfur lagging behind. Therefore, the base of the conflict in Darfur is more complicated than what each of the parties of the conflict separately or together could conceive. It is now necessary to make room for a dialogue concerning the roots of the crisis, the way it has developed, the level of its complexity and the future options for surpassing it. Darfur crisis has turns today into an international crisis that must be solved on new and creative bases in agreement with human right principles and the international humanitarian law and in agreement with the bases that spring from the historical, cultural, political and developmental reality of the crisis itself.

Darfur crisis in the media:-

All the Sudanese people, including the people of Darfur, were astonished when they first heard about the security council report that considered the situation in Darfur conflict a threat to the international peace and security, and a threat also to the stability of the region concluding that by taking the decision to use paragraph 7 of the united nation charter to investigate the Sudanese case in Darfur. The most astonishing thing for the Sudanese was their ignorance of the historical facts of Darfur as they didn't come to know it through the school curriculum, academic research or various national media organs that refer to Darfur only in terms of economic backwardness, local conflicts and other elements of the media negative coverage concerning Darfur people.

In short, during the last five hundred years of the history of the Sudanese land that extends from the Red Sea to the Atlantic Ocean, two states were famous. One of these two states is the Blue Sultanate located at the East of the Nile, the other is Darfur state located west of the Nile at the edge of the Great Sahara.

Although th two states lived apart within different groups of states and Sultanates, the international and the regional dynamics integrated them in one state which is the Sudanese state existing today. However, the circumstances that lead to that integration were not just for all the parties. These circumstances established the foundation for an unjust reality on which various types of political, economical and cultural injustices were accumulated. Due to this a revolt used to explode from time to time until it reached its final stage in form of rebellion and revolution against the bases on which the Sudanese state itself was built.

The modern Sudanese state was built on the political, cultural and administrative heritage of the Fonj state as a local component to the new Colonial rule which was an extension to the Turkish state in the Sudan excluding all the heritage of the more dynamic state in foreign relations: Darfur. One of the factors that contribute to Darfur isolation politically and to its marginalization economically is the British Colonial policy of (rule and divide) while its resources were and still are the most vital in establishing a modern economic reality based on export. That was the way the colonial state strengthened the repression and designed to distant the Citizen in Darfur from the political, cultural, administrative and security circles of influence by adopting policies that prohibited him/her from education and distant him/her from the participation in the state machinery. Beside that, such policies had an effect, in a

subtle way, in breaking up the natural relationships and exhausting the social and family fabrics until it became finally a servant in the context of new, productive, profiting and economical form that doesn't bring back to Darfur the expected benefit. The imbalance that exists in the structural bases of the Sudanese state has contributed to a great length in Darfur continuous historical injustice. When the armed conflict between the Sudan government and the SLA/M and JEM movements began the whole crisis of the last 100 years explodes. Darfur crisis emerged as a possibility of a dangerous regional and international threat on a background of portraying the conflict as one between the Arabs and the black Africans and portraying Darfur as a possible confrontational line between the Anglophone and the Francophone groups in Africa. The conflict in Darfur had its effect also on the two sides of the Atlantic, the USA and the European community states, especially in the issues of bringing the perpetrators of war crimes and the crimes against humanity in Darfur justice. Adding to this the conflict attracted the states benefiting from the oil to have interest and to take side on economical bases.

On the other level, the heritage of the long and continuous rule of Darfur has its effect on the way the ordinary citizen thinks. The citizen looks at himself/herself without taking any notice to the latest developments that encircling him/her. This situation made the possibility of diverting the energy of the ordinary citizen from concentrating on the past to look towards the future positively and optimistically a responsibility, which was not taken fully by the new leaders who shape the public opinion through the various media organs and forums. More precisely, the media refers still to the crisis and its effects and pressurises for resolving it but doesn't yet exposes the roots of the problems and the possibilities of surpassing it in a manner that conserve the unity of the country and the distinctive character of Darfur.

The media approaches of resolving the conflict

The parties of the armed conflict did well by responding positively to the calls for dialogue and negotiation and the acceptance of the regional arbitration with international guarantees. In spite of the fact that the consensus concerning the peace agreement in Darfur is not completed yet, the efforts made by the parties concerned with Darfur peace process will bear fruits and lead to a just and gradual settlement through the implementation of the agreement. This process will end by the end of the transitional period, which is the most important period in reconciling the Sudanese conditions concerning Darfur. The media will have a great share in shading the necessary light needed to open the channels for the political, developmental and cultural dialogue and to surpass the militarization of the crisis and its escalation towards war.

The basic pivots that would contribute to the promotion of the role of the media in the enlightenment and in the crystallization of the different trends and in creating the agreeable atmosphere suitable for dialogue, cultural exchange and common action are: -

A- The problem of affiliation to the homeland

The development of Darfuri people always comes before the race and the tribe. It is the affiliation to the homeland Darfur. In this context and through the illuminated media the state and the society work together to widen the base of awareness of citizenship in the other national circles to redefine Darfur firstly according to the agreement reached with consensus then secondly according to the new media policy to satisfy the affiliation to the Sudan on the bases of consensus.

b- The problem of the centre and the region

It became clear beyond any doubts, through wide and extensive dialogue, that the reasons advocated by the intellectuals that the crisis has originated from tribal or ethnic or resources conflict or external conspiracies or it's a conflict between the government and the rebels..etc are not enough causes and some of them are misleading. It becomes clear that the crisis was prolonged by the historical conflict between the modern centre which is not fully aware of Darfur conditions and the region that didn't remove the Sultanate and the independence costumes inspite of the apparent submission to the centre. If the problems between the centre and the region are solved in a satisfactory way, the region administration that enjoys the support of the centre will act through the cultural and social heritage to resolve the local crisis, including the tribal wars and the local conflicts through conferences such as the Darfuri-Darfuri conference of dialogue and consultation.

C- The problem of dependency and withdrawal

The long history of Darfur subjugation to a culturally different centre has created two currents in Darfur public life. The first is the current of dependency to what ever comes from the centre, including the political models of religious parties like that combine the religious sects with the economical interests. The second current is the current of withdrawal towards the inside and towards the past condemning anything that is modern. There are many issues pending waiting for the media to raise as agenda for dialogue between the parties of negotiation in the context of the common Sudanese culture. All the parties are keen to see Darfur with its resources and capabilities as a source of richness to the nation. For this purpose it is important to re-examine the actual reality of the integration of the two historical states of Funj and Darfur in one state on the bases of fact accompli (accomplished fact).

Types of media behaviour towards the crisis:-

On the premises that there were no reliable epistemological theses to explain Darfur crisis when the armed conflict exploded in 2003 the media was nearly disable to highlight the roots of the crisis with analysis and close examination and to propose solutions. The types of media behaviour that emerge on the surface towards the crisis include:-

1- The government media

The government, which was under the feeling of success of Kenya negotiation in reaching a peace settlement that preserve the fundamentals of the Ingaz rule, thought that the declaration of the rebellion in Darfur is an issue that can be tackled by military power, security suppression and misinformation. It received some encouragement, in principle, from the sponsor power of the comprehensive peace agreement. The government didn't adopt the recommendations of Alfashir consultation conference (Feb 2003) that call for the engagement in a dialogue with the armed groups because the roots of the injustices that lead the rebel to take up arms exist undoubtedly in Darfur. The government suppressed the news concerning the military operations and denied the Sudanese citizens the right to be informed about the situation. The government also became strict in blocking discussions; even the workshops that discuss Darfur crisis were banned (Alfashir university apologized for not hosting a workshop about the consequences of Darfur crisis) while the arrests and the harassments of the activists, who inform the public of the crisis, especially the students and the intellectuals, continue. This situation encouraged many of these

students and intellectuals to join the armed movements. In spite of the government acceptance of the principle of negotiation and the importance of the media in Darfur, in the role of softening the positions and surpassing the negotiating obstacles, the media organs were prevented by continuous security orders from the search and the transmission of the truth. The most painful reality is that the government media organs themselves deny what the independent media organs say.

2- The media of Darfur armed movements

The armed movements have launched the sparkle of the revolution and the rebellion against the government in Darfur after a preparation that seemed to have taken long time without attracting any suspicions towards the preparation activities. The activities were centred around the anticipated battles without any media plans to follow it up and to change its victories into political gains by using them to put pressure on the government. The parties of the conflict entered the war while there was a governmental blackout of information and a lack of introduction of the movements. The battles were fierce, the human losses were high, and the loss of possessions was a dominant feature caused by burning villages, killings and human rights violations. But the rebel movements were not able to benefit from that situation. The only thing that used to come from these movements are announcements declaring the battles results. There were announcements the government didn't dare to dispute the government didn't acknowledge that the citizens and the infrastructures have suffered continuous losses in the rare cases where officials announced through the media channels or express their anger at what they refer to as armed looting gangs, or bandits, promising to eliminate them.

The armed movements were confident that they are gaining ground in the battle field but on the media front they have no media plans except these few opportunities which were provided by satellite channels like Aljazira to present events or limited opportunities to express their views.

3- The role of the regional and international media:

When the government had faced real difficulties in the battlefield it turned towards the militarization of the tribes that didn't find itself in the list of the rebellion. It used the highest degrees of violence through aerial attacks and combing according to the policy of burning lands using the tribal groups loyal to it. As a result of this pressure the civilians' population fled to refugee camps or turned to the organizations working in these camps. These organizations informed the international institutions and the international and regional media channels about the reality of the wide security upheaval in Darfur and the deteriorating humanitarian situation. The international media that is based on competition, scoop of news reporting and freedom of approaching the subject, joined in covering the situation providing real images that affected the international and regional sentiment in a highly effective way beyond the ability of the Sudanese government efforts to suppress. These developments open a narrow gate for the crisis to find its way to the media. The armed movements benefited from these development in introducing Darfur case through the media, diplomatic and political forums although this didn't lead to the emergence of cadres who could develop the media discourse of the crisis to the advantage of the case of negotiation with the Sudan government based on that background.

The international and regional media (African and Arabic) has continued to concentrate, directly, on the ugliness of the war and the size of the tragedy and its effect on the human feeling which, left a mark of disgrace on the faces of all those

who have their names connected with that tragedy, without addressing the more serious means of surpassing it because the information concerning the roots of the crisis are not available easily. They need time to be investigated, recognized and then negotiated round the negotiating table.

4- The efforts of the civil society:-

Since the armed conflict in Darfur broke out, the civil society organizations and the lively powers of the Sudanese society, including the political opposition, have been very interested in knowing what is happening in Darfur and in participating in the analysis of the situation and in reaching to a solution and a settlement in spite of the exhausting efforts of the government to suppress the information concerning the events and to target the powers calling for dialogue in all its various levels, by arrest, banning and imprisonment.

In spite of all that some organizations called for getting in addressing the media issue as one of the elements for deconstruction of the crisis. The most remarkable of these efforts is “workshop: The role of the media in solving Darfur crisis” which took place on the 5th and the 6th of September 2005 in Dr. Mohammed Abdulhay room in Khartoum, papers were presented in that direction Ustaz Faisal Mohammed Salih presented a paper on the media and peace in Darfur in the workshop: “The civil society from conflict solution to conflict prevention”. There were also symposiums and meetings on the necessity of the media as a factor in resolving the crisis. In the same time the universities and other higher education students participated although their participation was in the direction of the mobilization of the campaigns in confrontation with the government and its allies. They found in the international media what could help them in addressing Darfur case through the security and humanitarian crisis. In a later and positive development, journalists and reporters from younger generations, have established under the slogan “The word instead of the bullet” the “Darfur journalists reporters and other media practitioners ” a voluntary charitable and cultural association operating in the media field to serve the freedom of expression, introducing the inspiration of Darfuri people and protecting the interest of the region with assurance of working towards the unity of the Sudan and its people within the media role in shading light on the crisis and resolving it.

The most important intellectual components of this approach are:-

- 1- The crisis of Darfur is a product of historical, political, cultural and social complex factors.
- 2- To Whatever extent the armed conflict intensities the solution accepted by all parties is the sustainable one.
- 3- The integration of the roles in media performance towards the solution is a political, professional and ethical necessity.
- 4- The dialogue between the parties of the conflict, through the media channels, their negotiation and agreement represent the basic step in the implementation of the peace agreement in Darfur.
- 5- It doesn't seem to exist a contradiction between the national and the international media if the national media is given access to information and facts to win back the trust and if the same opportunities are provided for comparison and criticism.

Summary and recommendation:-

The political process in Darfur became a motive through the opposition and the agreement project that was based on two basic axes:-

- 1- The axis of power and wealth sharing and security arrangement.
- 2- The axis of the Darfuri – Darfuri – Chadi dialogue.

The paper explained that in order to proceed in the agreement scheme it is important to formulate an integrated thesis on the media issue based on the freedom of accessing information and the independency of the media position. A wide debate took place in the workshop: “ The role of the media in resolving Darfur crisis”.