

**The Role and Contribution of the Diaspora in the Development of South Sudan: An  
Address by Dr. David S. Bassiouni to the  
4<sup>th</sup> Western Equatoria Community Association (WECA) Annual Conference,  
Sioux Falls, South Dakota, 26<sup>th</sup>-27<sup>th</sup> May 2012**

Hon Sapana Abuyi, Deputy Governor, WES  
Chairman of Board of Directors of WECA  
Chairman of Executive Committee of WECA  
Distinguished South Sudanese Guests and Friends of South Sudan Distinguished  
Participants  
Ladies and Gentlemen

I feel honoured to have been asked to address this WECA conference and particularly this session, open to all South Sudanese and the friends of South Sudan

We meet at a crucial moment in our tragedy-packed history

- It has been almost a year since independence when the long suffering people of South Sudan, took their fate in their hands and cast a decisive vote for an independent sovereign state
- There is much to be proud of ...a peaceful cessation, the birth of a new nation welcomed warmly into the international community of nations; returnees flooding home; global attention and goodwill and a place to call...a home of our own
- But, independence comes with great responsibilities and at a high price.
- I do not need to tell you that we face critical challenges in South Sudan today...even more so now with the Oil shutdown and the unavoidable austerity measures and the continuing stalemate in the negotiations of the outstanding post-independence issues.
- Many in the international community question our viability as a sovereign state and our ability to endure and triumph.
- We must prove them wrong but, more importantly, we must live up to our destiny, fulfill our dream of independence and stay true to what we struggled for and what our countless fallen heroes and heroines paid the ultimate price for
- 
- We cannot achieve these lofty goals by shifting all the responsibility for development and prosperity of South Sudan to our compatriots inside our young nascent country.
- Much will depend on the dedication, commitment and contributions of the South Sudanese Diaspora through rising up to the challenges of developing the motherland.
- We have many excellent examples around us to follow from Rwanda's rebirth from genocide to Botswana's economic miracle...each one propelled by their Diaspora community.

- I want to share some thoughts on how the Diaspora can contribute to development (how you can help your country) and also how your country can engage the Diaspora.

## **Part I: How to Prepare?**

There is a clarion call for the Diaspora to rally and contribute to the development of their country. But, unless they are able to prepare themselves well for this role, they may just as well be irrelevant and useless to their country of origin.

My favourite story relating to the discipline of learning and education is what I term the Vietnamese Family Code. The Vietnamese father, sitting around the table with his wife and four children would go round and point to each child: *"You will be a doctor, you will be an engineer, you will be a lawyer and you will be a teacher."* Regardless of whether the child had the required talent for the assigned profession or not, he or she would go out in the world and dutifully struggle to fulfill the father's wishes.

Are we then surprised that today that Asians dominate Sciences, Medicine, Engineering and Computer Technology worldwide?

- Do not shun the "STEM" careers ("Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics") for they are the platforms for professional success
- Today in the United States while American children including our own are spending time playing computer games and enjoying life, Asian children are excelling in the Sciences.
- Do not shun the Arts and Social Sciences for they are the key to a rich creative, humane and humanistic approach to life.
- Education is the key to success but not a passport to automatic success because success is earned through hard work, determination, endurance and an indomitable will to succeed.
- Vocational & Skills Training are virtues and nothing to be ashamed of. They will change and reverse the wrong opinion and trend that now that we are independent we should no longer soil our hands but relegate the responsibility for menial jobs to foreigners.
- Job apprentice, learn for yourself and learn for others. It is the surest way to translate knowledge into practical skills and expertise.
- Marriage and family is the bedrock of stability, direction and success.
- Measure your competency and ability by your sense of time. If you are still on "Sudan Standard Time," you are lost, you have no future and you have missed history and your destiny.
- Community work and public service are the hallmark of leadership. Future leaders come from the ranks of those who are ready to serve others.

- Familiarize yourselves with all government, international community and NGO development plans in South Sudan.
- Participate fully in all facets of life--social, economic and political in your host country and you may rise as the leader to serve and save your adopted community/country.
- Preserve your culture, customs & language while integrating what is best from around you through passing good practices via your children & successive generations.
- It is now a proven trend that the first generation of immigrants try to forget where they originally came from, the second generation integrate and assimilate and the third generation, popularly dubbed as the "cheetahs", know where they ancestors came from and build bridges with their countries of origin.
- Africa today is leaping forward due to the hard work and contributions of third generation immigrants, the "cheetahs" who are returning home from years abroad to contribute to their countries. You are no exception.
- Although you may be the first and second generations, your children will be the cheetahs so prepare them well culturally and nationalistically as South Sudanese for that role
- We are working and living in societies that embody and respect integrity, accountability and transparency. Transfer these laudable principles, codes of conduct and ethics.
- Whoever you are, wherever you are, whatever you do, you are the Ambassador of your country, South Sudan...So carry yourself with decorum, responsibility, integrity and dignity.

## **Part II: What can you do for your Country?**

JFK axiom-"***Ask not what your country can do for you but what you can do for your country***", but I urge you to, "***also ask what your country can do for you***", to engage you meaningfully in the march in its development and prosperity

- Every Diaspora is an Advocate and an Ambassador for South Sudan so be one
- Diaspora constitutes a rich reservoir of expertise, skills & knowledge in various disciplines - place these at the disposal and service of your country
- Complete the ESSCA initiated comprehensive Diaspora Database covering all disciplines to facilitate the professional support to South Sudan
- Engage in voluntary and remunerated short term assignments, sabbaticals & attachments in projects and programmes in South Sudan
- Consider long term assignments as possible ultimate service to your country

- Many developing countries depend heavily on remittances from their working citizens abroad to sustain their economies. Even a failed state like Somalia receives over \$1Billion yearly from its Diaspora. You are not different and can contribute significantly to the economy of your country
- This brings me to an anecdote of a South Sudanese mother who on hearing that her NY-based son (a waiter) was threatening to quit work washing dishes because of sore hands, promised to send her gloves & urged him to continue toiling so that her monthly remittance of \$100 could continue uninterrupted!
- It also reminds me of another anecdote that the device the Diaspora hate most is the mobile telephone because their grandmothers back home can reach them wherever they are to ask for money but is this not the least reward they deserve for all the care and love they gave us?
- Create a greater role & place for empowering Diaspora women to take their rightful leadership positions in all facets of South Sudanese life including community-led initiatives in strengthening family bonds and child care and upbringing at home and in adopted countries
- Encourage and promote investment from host countries to South Sudan
- Encourage and promote trade and commerce with host countries
- Facilitate the establishment of academic relationship between institutions of learning in host countries and South Sudan
- Explore scholarships and training opportunities for students of back home
- Facilitate cultural and artistic exchanges between host countries and country of origin
- Organize and run for public office and public positions in adopted countries
- Launch and operate small businesses and entrepreneurial ventures especially back home
- If you have made a firm decision to live permanently in your new country, find other effective alternative avenues for contributing to the development of your country
- Be a role model to your compatriots in demonstrating by personal example the virtues of integrity, accountability, transparency and the codes of good conduct and ethics

**Part III: What should ROSS do to encourage and promote the effective utilization of diaspora knowledge,skills,talent and human resources?**

**Ask your Country what it can do for you to be useful to the motherland**

- Establish the national commission for Diaspora affairs under consideration, nationally with secretaries in the states to coordinate and build a viable and robust relationship between the Diaspora and the motherland
- Establish through the Diaspora Commission an active participatory consultative fora for dialogue and exchanging views, ideas and suggestions on development and current affairs amongst the Diaspora and between them and authorities and compatriots at home
- Negotiate with UNDP the TOKTEN Special Scheme for topping salaries of Diaspora interested to go home & serve in the motherland
- Encourage and empower Diaspora women to invest their special knowledge, talent and skills in leadership roles to support their sisters back home to play their full part in all facets of South Sudanese life
- Establish investment incentives for Diaspora interested in starting businesses in the motherland
- Encourage allocation of land to Diaspora to develop to re-establish roots with the motherland
- Encourage and honour Diaspora who have distinguished themselves professionally and accomplished outstandingly in their careers
- There are great examples for us to learn from. For example, take Rwanda which emerged from the terrible genocide to become an economic miracle...In Rwanda, thousands of diaspora are returning to start businesses and train their countrymen thanks to diaspora initiatives and pro-business + pro-investment policies...and where global corporations like Starbucks and Google are investing...where Rwandan-German Private Equity funds (Angermayer, Brumm & Lange) are launching investments...where Rwandan-Canadian firms (Ecosystem Restoration Associates) are pioneering sustainable development initiatives....
- Speaking recently to diaspora in Paris, President Paul Kagame said the following: “I don’t know if there is any Rwandan who wishes to be poor, sleep on an empty stomach, or see their children not going to school or fall sick. I don’t know of anyone or any group that wishes to live in absolute poverty...Opportunity comes once, when you have a chance, use it. When you relax a bit, the opportunity goes, what we have today is an opportunity. When we waste it for the next 5-10 years, we won’t have it again.”
- That is the very same opportunity we should be embracing fully in South Sudan

## **Conclusion**

- We have an independent nation that we can proudly call our own.
- But that is not enough...the challenges of building a nation are great and demand selfless sacrifices from us

- It is incumbent upon each South Sudanese especially those in the diaspora to lend their expertise and capabilities towards the development and prosperity of our nation for that is our fate, destiny and duty
- We have no choice but to embrace this national duty and fulfill it fully to chart a path and leave behind a footprint of hope for the coming generations to build a stronger, united, secure, prosperous and respected South Sudan enjoying the universally accepted four freedoms and living in harmony and peace with its neighbours as a responsible member of the world community of nations.