

A space for preserving the diversity  
and the unity of the South Sudan

## The House of Nationalities (el-Mazalla el-kawmiya)



The *House of Nationalities* is built on the premise that the cultural diversity of the South Sudanese is their biggest wealth. Languages and cultures are the bricks of any national identity, and their respect forms the foundation of sustainable peace and development.

Diversity, however, is a fragile good, it needs care, and it needs protection against political manipulation. The *House of Nationalities* is providing both. It aims at protecting the identity of all ethnic communities (nationalities) living in the South Sudan.

The concept of the *House of Nationalities* has grown out of the painful experience of fifty years of civil war in the Sudan. A war of visions along the North-South divide has devastated many parts of the country. It has further fragmented the society of the South Sudan along ethnic lines.

The *House of Nationalities* is promoting reconciliation between the ethnic communities of the South Sudan, and it is preparing the way to development by mobilizing traditional structures and enhancing values for modernization.

## Challenges

Being aware of the fragility a war-torn society is facing, many South Sudanese are anxiously asking the following questions:

- ☞ How can peace and stability be ensured in the South Sudan which has experienced so many divisions and violent conflicts along ethnic lines?
- ☞ How can the more than sixty ethnic communities living in the South Sudan unite while preserving their diversity and keeping their dignity?
- ☞ How can cultural ignorance be overcome and mutual respect be enhanced for each and every community?

## Background

The concept of a *House of Nationalities* was developed by Sudanese intellectuals during two workshops held in 2000 and 2001, and this as the answer to the crucial questions on cultural diversity and political stability. In January 2003, more than seventy leaders of the South Sudanese Civil Society<sup>1</sup> and representatives of various ethnic groups met for three days in Nairobi and came up in strong support of the project, agreeing that all communities should decide themselves on the implementation of a *House of Nationalities* during a national conference to be held inside the South Sudan.

In preparation of such a national meeting, a delegation composed of chiefs and members of the civil society visited *Botswana* and its 'House of Chiefs' in order to learn from the experiences made in a country praised for its fine record of good governance and economic growth.

During the years of 2003 and 2004, the idea of creating a *House of Nationalities* spread all over the South Sudan. Arguing that the future belonged also to them, the Youth and Women united at the occasion of workshops held in Kenya, in Uganda and indeed in all the three regions of the South Sudan. They raised their voice in support of the project which they consider to be important for peace among the ethnic communities and for harmonious development.

Of great significance was the first Women conference on the *House of Nationalities* held in Lokichokio in November 2003 when the seventy participants agreed that a forum of traditional leaders would provide them with a most efficient platform for improving the status and role of women in the South Sudan.

In June 2004, the SPLM invited over 300 kings, chiefs and spiritual leaders of the South Sudan to a historical conference. The Movement presented to them the results of the peace negotiations achieved so far and thanked them for their contribution in the liberation-war. In the meeting's final resolution, the chiefs formally demanded the recognition of the country's cultural diversity, asked for a role in the peaceful resolution of conflicts among their communities, and a forum for regular meetings of traditional leaders representing all the ethnic communities (el-Mazalla el-kawmiya) in the South Sudan.

## Objectives

The aims of the *House of Nationalities* are:

- ☞ to provide the space for representatives of all ethnic communities of the South Sudan to meet in a spirit of mutual respect;
- ☞ to promote the dignity and the culture of all South Sudanese communities;
- ☞ to gain the State's recognition of the different ethnic communities in the South Sudan;
- ☞ to be a body to be consulted by the government before laws or policies that affect the communities are adopted, in particular those concerning culture, communal land and customary law;

<sup>1</sup> the Horn of Africa Centre for Democracy and Development, the Civil Society Commission of the SPLM/National Peace and Reconciliation Desk, the Sudan Women Voice of Peace, the New Sudan Youth Association, the Centre for Documentation and Advocacy, the New Sudan Council of Churches, the New Sudan Indigenous NGO's Network and the Federation of Sudanese Civil Society

- ☞ to lay the foundation for a new concept of a nation-state by putting cultural diversity at the core of shaping a new national identity;
- ☞ to serve as a venue for the settlement of disputes. It will empower communities to solve conflicts themselves while protecting their cultural and ethnic diversity from political manipulation.

## Principles

In the *House of Nationalities*, all sixty-two ethnic communities of the South Sudan will be represented. In addition, distinct sections of geographically divided ethnic communities should be represented as separate entities in their own right. This could mean that initially about ninety communities (see the list on the last page) would be represented in the *House of Nationalities*.

Once fully established, the *House of Nationalities* will set up its own rules and procedures and will decide if additional communities should join the *House of Nationalities*. The chairmanship of the *House of Nationalities* may rotate from one community to the next.

The *House of Nationalities* will be independent of all political parties. It will not substitute a future Parliament, which will be elected by the people of the South Sudan. The political authorities will decide whether it shall be given any formal judiciary or legislative powers.

## Location

The members of the *House of Nationalities* may meet at places of historical significance. The meeting-places could rotate between the different states of the South Sudan in order to promote lasting friendship amongst the communities. Though the *House of Nationalities* has been planned for the South Sudan as a whole, *Houses of Nationalities* at the level of each state could be established to provide more space to cultural diversity in the South Sudan.

## Ownership

The *House of Nationalities* is the property of all ethnic communities of the South Sudan.

Each community is responsible for strengthening the *House of Nationalities*. The work can be started in many places by different communities, but it will only be completed when all South Sudanese communities have found their place in the *House of Nationalities*.

## Answers to some initial concerns

Initial fears saw the *House of Nationalities* as an instrument to be used against major ethnic communities. But all cultures have the same significance, and all are in need of the same protection. Although the various communities may be different in culture and in size, all communities count with an equality of rights.

There were worries that the *House of Nationalities* might become an obstacle for building a modern state. But Somaliland, where the tribal house called «Guurti» prepared the ground for the establishment of modern institutions, provides a reassuring experience, and so could Botswana, where a "House of Chiefs" was set up by the country's modern constitution.

Concerns were also raised that a *House of Nationalities* in the South Sudan might separate the South from its immediate neighbours to the North. However, tribal structures also exist in the North, the East and the West of Sudan. Different *Houses of Nationalities* could therefore be created in the other parts of the country. By giving cultural diversity a political recognition, the *House of Nationalities* will make an important contribution to a new vision of a nation-state for the whole of the Sudan.

For additional information see [www.houseofnationalities.org](http://www.houseofnationalities.org)

## List of Nationalities

Nationality (subject to amendment)	District (previous denomination)		
1 Acholi	Torit	44 Jur Mananger	Gogrial
2 Aja	Raga	45 Kakwa	Yei
3 Anyuak [ <i>Anyuua</i> ]	Akobo, Pibor	46 Keliku	Yei
4 Atuot [ <i>Reel</i> ]	Yirol	47 Kresh	Raga
5 Avukaya	Maridi	48 Kuku	Keji Keji
6 Azande	Maridi, Yambio, Wau, Tambura	49 Lango	Torit
7 Bai	Raga	50 Latuka [ <i>Otuho</i> ]	Torit
8 Baka	Maridi	51 Logir	Torit
9 Balanda-Boor	Wau, Tambura	52 Lokoya	Torit
10 Balanda-Bviri	Wau	53 Lolubo	Torit
11 Banda	Raga	54 Lopit	Torit
12 Bari	Juba	55 Lugbwara	Yei
13 Binga	Raga	56 Maban	Renk
14 Bongo	Tonj, Wau	57 Madi	Torit
15 Boya [ <i>Larim</i> ]	Kapoeta	58 Makaraka	Yei
16 Buldit	Nasir	59 Mangayat	Raga
17 Didinga	Kapoeta	Moro:	
Dinka [ <i>Jieng, Mony jang</i> ]:		60 Kodo-Moro	Maridi
18 Abialang-Dinka	Renk	61 Miza-Moro	Mundri
19 Agar-Dinka	Rumbek	62 Mundari	Juba
20 Agier-Dinka	Renk	63 Mundu	Maridi, Yei
21 Aliab-Dinka	Yirol	Murle:	
22 Alor-Dinka	Bentiu	64 Hill-Murle (Boma)	Pibor
23 Bor-Dinka	Bor	65 Plain-Murle (Lotilla)	Pibor
24 Ciec-Dinka	Yirol	66 Ndogo	Wau, Raga
25 Gok-Dinka	Rumbek	Nuer [ <i>Naath</i> ]:	
26 Hol-Dinka	Bor	67 Bul-Nuer	Bentiu
27 Luac-Dinka	Pangak	68 Dok-Nuer	Bentiu
28 Malual-Dinka	Aweil, Gogrial	69 Gawaar-Nuer	Pangak
29 Ngok-Dinka	Bailiet	70 Jagei-Nuer	Bentiu
30 Nyarweng-Dinka	Bor	71 Jikany-Nuer	Bentiu
31 Nyiel-Dinka	Renk	72 Jikany-Nuer	Nasir
32 Pan Aru-Dinka	Bentiu	73 Laak-Nuer	Pangak
33 Rek-Dinka [ <i>Luac, Apuk</i> ]	Tonj	74 Lek-Nuer	Bentiu
34 Thoi-Dinka	Pangak	75 Lou-Nuer	Akobo
35 Twic-Dinka	Bor	76 Nyuong-Nuer	Bentiu
36 Dongotona	Torit	77 Nyangatom	Kapoeta
37 Feroghe	Raga	78 Nyangwara	Juba
38 Gollo	Wau	79 Pãri	Torit
39 Horiok [ <i>incl. the Imurok, Ifwoto, Lofirha, and Iyere</i> ]	Torit	80 Pajullo	Yei
40 Imatong	Torit	81 Sere	Raga
41 Jiye	Pibor	82 Shatt	Raga
42 Jur Biel [ <i>Beli</i> ]	Rumbek, Mundri	83 Shilluk, [ <i>Chollo</i> ]	Kodok, Malakal
43 Jur Chol [ <i>Luo</i> ]	Aweil, Raga, Tonj, Wau	84 Suri (Kachipo)	Pibor
		85 Tenet	Torit
		86 Teuth	Kapoeta
		87 Tid	Kapoeta
		88 Toposa	Kapoeta
		89 Uduk	Renk
		90 Yulu	Raga