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# ON THE EXPERIENCE OF THE SUDANESE PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATION: PERSONAL TESTIMONIAL

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## About the Author

Mohamed Nagi Alassam is a 30-year-old medical doctor and is a member of the Central Committee of Sudan Doctors (CCSD) which has been fighting for better health services for Sudanese people and a better working environment for the doctors across Sudan. CCSD led nationwide strikes in October and November 2016 and then led the longest doctor strike in the history of Sudan during the Sudanese revolution, lasting 207 days until the fall of the Al Bashir regime.

In mid-2018, Mohamed became a member of the executive committee of the Sudanese Professionals Association (SPA), as well as its spokesperson. SPA, which played a pivotal role in mobilizing masses in Sudan by leading the revolution and ensuring its peacefulness all the way through, is a coalition of different independent professional organizations which spearheaded the Forces for Freedom and Change (FFC), the largest coalition in the history of Sudan. The FFC helped lead the revolution of 2018. Alassam was also a member of the negotiation committee of the FFC with the Transitional Military Council until the signing of the constitutional declaration and the establishment of the civilian-led transitional authority that would rule Sudan for the following three years.

Alassam was arrested on 4th of January 2019 after he came out publicly as the first member of SPA to ever appear and was released after 98 days. Alassam announced the Declaration of Freedom and Change, the charter which was drafted by SPA and then by the different youth movements and opposition political parties and was successful in uniting the Sudanese community inside and abroad around certain goals and demands.

Mohamed was again detained for two weeks following the military coup d'état on 25 October, 2021 which suspended the democratic transition, a military rule that faced massive resistance from the Sudanese people.

Mohamed spoke at the Oslo Freedom Forum in 2020 about his own experience during Sudanese revolution, and he was amongst three finalists of the Human Rights Tulip award of 2020.

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## Introduction: Current Context in Sudan

Sudan is currently at a turning point in its history. The Sudanese people are continuing their peaceful mass movements in pursuit of freedom, peace, and justice. This has always been the slogan of the ongoing December 2018 Revolution that ousted General Omar al-Bashir and his military-Islamist regime.

Since 25 October 2021, protesters have steadfastly resisted a coup by the generals of the Sudanese Armed Forces in alliance with the Rapid Support Forces and some armed groups, who overthrow the transitional authority and discarded the constitutional document established in the wake of the December Revolution.

Protests have persisted since last October 2021, with Sudanese resistance committees organizing and leading continuous protests supported by political parties opposing the coup, as well as trade unions and professional associations. The unprecedented phenomenon of resisting the military with such momentum, intensity, and steadfastness has in one way or another undermined the coup. During more than 10 months since the coup, the generals had failed to form a government and remained under constant pressure that forced them into concessions looking for a way out.

The coup used all methods of violence against peaceful protesters. Over 100 protesters were killed, mainly due to direct live fire, with thousands more arrested. Nonetheless, weekly demonstrations continued in Khartoum and across various Sudanese states.

In the wake of the coup, resistance committees emerged as the main driver of grassroots action. They are democratic decentralized bodies that were formed in the neighbourhoods, mostly since the December 2018 Revolution. Their main purpose is to coordinate demonstrations and peaceful resistance activities across Sudan. Members include community members and residents regardless of their party affiliations, connected mainly by their support of the Revolution, change, and democracy agenda, as well as their rejection of totalitarian military rule.

Following the divisions that marred the Sudanese Professional Association (SPA) since mid-2020, the resistance committees gradually became the main players opposing the coup. The SPA had been a key pillar in Sudan since the inception of the December 2018 Revolution. It gathered various elements of the Sudanese civil society, including trade unions, political parties, etc., under the Forces of Freedom and Change. However, as a result of the divisions, the SPA, and its various components, has lost its ability to lead political and mass action, hence the Sudanese ingenuity in providing alternatives to continue to lead the masses and earn their trust.

Despite the divisions that plagued the SPA, trade unions and professional associations have since the coup retained a complementary and supportive role to the resistance committees. However, they remain marginal. Despite continuous strikes in various sectors, the collective and joint action of unions has remained underwhelming and failed to meet the hopes and expectations of the Sudanese.

## Purpose and Perspective of the Paper

As a personal testimonial, this paper addresses the experience of the SPA from its early inception in 2016 until its divisions in May 2020.

This testimonial is based on personal and direct experience of the different phases. It is a compilation of personal and individual observations with no connection to the positions of the bodies which I hold, or in which I have been a member. Since late 2016, I was the representative of the Central Committee of Sudanese Doctors (CCSD) in the discussions and efforts made towards establishing the SPA until its foundation in July 2018. I then became a member of the SPA Secretariat and an SPA spokesperson. Therefore, this paper documents the events from the perspective of a participant. It presents positive and negative aspects to inform future phases and documents the key statements issued during that time (see annexes).

The paper is divided into six parts. Part 1 gives a historic overview of union action in Sudan. Part 2 presents the milestones that led to the inception of the SPA. Part 3 covers the various roles of the SPA in leading the Revolution and SPA structures and bylaws. Part 4 documents the path leading towards the founding of the SPA and its role in popular protests. Part 5 discusses the reasons for rifts inside the SPA. Part 6 provides an outlook into the future in hopes of building more stable and solid union coalitions.

# 1. Historic Overview of the Role of Unions and Professional Coalitions

Union action in Sudan dates back to the early 20th century with the first protest action undertaken by workers of the Forest Wood Quarry in 1908 in protest against working conditions. These efforts gradually grew into organizing workers. In the 1930s, workers' clubs were founded in various areas and cities of Sudan and contributed to managing and discussing labor and union issues at a greater level. In the late 1940s, the Railway Workers Affairs Association was the first modern union and the first labor law was promulgated in 1947 under colonial rule. In 1950, the Sudanese Workers' Trade Union Federation was founded and largely contributed to the national struggle against colonialism until independence was declared by the elected Sudanese Parliament on 19 December 1955.

Union action in Sudan was affected by totalitarian and military governments as were other forms of organization in the Sudanese civil society. The dictatorships that ruled Sudan for over 50 years post-independence often started their totalitarian agenda by dissolving and then domesticating unions by creating sham unions that supported them. These dictators populated the sham unions with members exclusively from their inner circle. They would go about persecuting real unionists and professional associations, with the aim of shutting down public spaces and smothering any possibility of democratic or civil action that could threaten the foundations of their totalitarian regime.

Prolonged dictatorships have greatly impacted union action because it relies on accumulated and continuous awareness. They prevented the growth and development of historic unions, such as the Sudanese Workers' Trade Union Federation, the Railway Workers Affairs Association, and many others. As a result, after the toppling of totalitarian

rule, unions had to start their establishment from scratch. This was especially true following the collapse of the Islamist Front Regime, more so than any other dictatorship in Sudan. The Inqaz (Salvation) regime targeted unions from the start of the coup in 1989. Unions were dissolved, and their leaders were chased, imprisoned and tortured. The regime then established and supported distorted union-like bodies applying the orders of the ruling party.

Still, the union movement would not be deterred; it continued to mobilize its base and defend its causes. Throughout the three-decade rule of General Al-Bashir, unionists organized themselves in various professional and advocacy associations driven mainly by the unions' rejection of the regime and their efforts to create independent organizations that draw their legitimacy, calls and causes from the base. These organizations were known under several names, including parallel and alternative union associations.

Despite the totalitarian context, unions and coalitions have always played pivotal roles throughout Sudanese history. Union coalitions have always been a driving force of political change. The Associations Front was a powerhouse in the October 1964 Revolution that contributed to toppling General Ibrahim Abboud. Also, the union coalition was key to ousting General Nimeri during the transitional rule in April 1985. Again, in 2018, the SPA led the December Revolution that brought down General Omar Al-Bashir after 30 years of dictatorship.

These coalitions were key in galvanizing the masses and undertaking peaceful non-violent actions for change such as demonstrations, sit-ins, strikes, and civil disobedience.

## 2. Path to the SPA

### Committee of Physicians and the SPA Inception

Physicians have always been among the most politically influential professionals throughout Sudan's modern history. They have always led protest movements against injustice and dictatorial rule. At the beginning of the Inqaz regime and the dissolution of all unions, doctors were again at the frontlines of defending democracy and freedom in Sudan. Many of them lost their lives, including Dr Ali Fadel (1950-1990) who was assassinated by the regime with a nail to the head.

During the three-decade mandate of the Inqaz Regime, many physician committees that led advocacy and professional action opposed the regime's policies. They were always subjected to the regime's oppression and the constant persecution of cadres and leaders, most recently before the establishment of the Central Committee of Sudan Doctors (CCSD) in 2016. Despite the regime's relentless effort, the Sudanese Registrars Committee spearheaded a series of strikes in 2010 that humiliated the regime and showed its inability to silence the masses – especially the physicians – and undermine their persistent capacity to organize, unite, and engage in joint action.

Like other sectors, doctors' groups drew from the dynamic mobilization of the Sudanese student movement which has always provided the group with opposition political cadres that had reasonable organizational and mobilization capacities. It utilized the student movement's experience in resisting regime-affiliated cadres inside universities. Indeed, physician movement leaders were often former leaders of the student movement in various Sudanese universities, especially with significant political student action in medical schools.

### 2016: The Turning Point

In early 2016, several registrars and other junior physicians came to the Council of Medical Specializations in Khartoum and organized a sit-in protest against increased training fees. This action was an extension of a movement that had started over a year ago by the Doctors Committee in Gezira State, which would later become the heart of the Central Committee of Sudanese Doctors (CCSD) and the physicians' movement overall.

The CCSD executive bureau was later formed and focused on drafting a memorandum that addressed the most pressing issues for doctors. It covered three main areas: training conditions, the improvement of poor work environments, as well as the increasing attacks on medical personnel and the need to draft a physician protection law that would enact harsher punishments and work as a deterrent.

When Surgery registrars were accused of premeditated murder in March 2016, hundreds of doctors gathered in Omdurman Hospital in solidarity and protest, that moment represented an important milestone for more unification among physicians. It drew attention to the great capacity of their collective work and its growing impact and coincided with the delivery of the memorandum to Bahr Abu Garda, the then Federal Minister of Health.

The committee endeavored to organize the physicians' base in the various states and hospitals. It worked towards ensuring their endorsement of the terms of the memorandum, which was purely professional and addressed key demands. The committee represented all working physicians who did not have any entity or union that could express their concerns, organized continuous visits to a number of states, including the White Nile and the Nile River and worked intensively in Khartoum state hospitals.

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In May 2016, more than 50 doctors were arbitrarily dismissed from Kosti Hospital in White Nile State due to demands related to the work environment. This led to protest activities in Hasahisa and Sennar, and in front of the office of the Federal Minister of Health inside the ministry buildings. In the last stand, the attendance did not exceed thirty doctors. However, the simultaneous protests in a number of cities and the sit-in inside the ministry were significant developments that demonstrated the doctors' bravery in raising their voices against the authorities.

## Organizing, Awareness Raising, and the Importance of Media Engagement

Further to raising awareness and grassroots organization, the CCSD relied on Facebook and social media, which contributed to unprecedented and unexpected mass mobilization. This was evident in the physicians' movement at the end of 2016, two years before the revolution. The CCSD's exemplary media presence was emulated later on at a larger scale in SPA methods and tactics to mobilize the Sudanese masses. The CCSD media office formed the nucleus of the SPA media office. It had multiple media responsibilities, including securing SPA social media accounts during the revolution and handling a large part of drafting remarks and press statements.

In addition to social media, the CCSD added thousands of doctors to WhatsApp groups numbered from one to ten, which included communication officials in the sub-committees in the different states, and a huge number of general public doctors inside and outside Sudan. These groups contributed greatly to the rapid transmission of information between the Central Committee, the subcommittees, and the doctors and formed the main media platform for internal communication between the Central Committee, the subcommittees, and the doctors.

## 6 October Strike

On 3 October, thousands of doctors gathered, for the first time in six years, in the courtyard of Bahri Teaching Hospital, in response to the calls of CCSD. The executive office – after long and exhausting efforts of organizing and raising awareness – had resolved to escalate the doctors' peaceful movement. At that time, the strike had been previously announced in Bahri and Omdurman Hospitals after other attacks. The meeting sought to discuss the unified escalation steps that would include the largest possible base of physicians across all Sudanese states.

In fact, despite our great efforts in the executive office of which I was a member, everyone was surprised by the huge number of doctors who responded, and no one expected that the event would be so big. The meeting of 3 October went as arranged, and CCSD leadership spoke, in addition to a number of other doctors. An open strike on all non-emergencies across all hospitals in Sudan was declared from 6 October until the doctors' demands listed in the memorandum delivered to the Federal Ministry of Health at the beginning of the year were met.

The strike proceeded at an escalating pace, garnering more solidarity every day, and spreading to government hospitals in all states of Sudan. Notices and statements of the strike were sent from the most remote places in Sudan, along with pictures of doctors standing tall and holding banners expressing the unified and common demands of all doctors. The CCSD media presence at that time contributed greatly to this exponential expansion and solidarity with the strike through the slogans raised, including “We Strike for Your Sake, Citizen”, which contributed to easing pressures on doctors and stripping the government of its ability to attack and demonize physicians. The movement held the regime responsible for the poor services and publicized the clear objectives and reasons for the strike. All of this was done through social media pages and WhatsApp groups, in addition to the organizational work undertaken by the CCSD and subcommittees in the various states.

Then, a series of activities were organized in solidarity with the public strikes. They carried banners and hung them in their workplaces and other public places. Other similar professional entities also stood in solidarity, namely the Sudanese Journalists Network, the Teachers' Committee, and the Democratic Lawyers Alliance.

The 6 October strike lasted for eight days – during which doctors shook the very pillars of the Sudanese state. The strike shocked all components of the state who did not know how to deal with it – particularly with its great effectiveness and spread, its growing influence and the positive reactions it received from Sudanese society.

## Snowball: Organizing and Slogans

In 2016, the CCSD called for two strikes. The first, which was an open strike on addressing non-emergencies, started on 6 October and lasted eight days. The second was in early November and was known as the scheduled strike on non-emergencies. Unexpectedly, throughout October and during the first strike, the security services did not carry out any arrests, which allowed the CCSD leadership the opportunity to act without major harassment from the state. However,



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this did not last long; major arrests started to take place immediately after the announcement of the second strike.

The CCSD media office, which includes male and female doctors inside and outside Sudan, worked relentlessly in drafting statements, obtaining pictures of strikes and protests from various hospitals across Sudan, and even creating new media tools and slogans to garner the mass endorsement of the doctors' demands.

The movement utilized special slogans to attract the attention and support of everyday citizens. In addition to "We Strike for Your Sake, Citizen," the slogan of #Every\_Doctor\_Is\_A\_Committee was used to fight against the impact of arrests. It also released the Hundred Videos campaign, in which the CCSD called on all doctors to record short videos that discussed the goals of the strike and its importance for public health.

### CCSD Strategy: The Doctors' Issues First

Since its central role first in the Committee of Doctors of Gezira State in 2015, and then throughout the CCSD action since March 2016, the CCSD's Strategy was based on professionally addressing doctors' issues while avoiding direct political discussion as much as possible. This sought to ensure that the largest possible base of physicians rallied behind issues that affect them tangibly and directly and represent non-controversial demands. This led to a huge and unprecedented endorsement followed by a greater commitment to the CCSD's escalating activities. The success of this strategy was also evident in the involvement of many affiliates in CCSD activities from across a broad political spectrum. When the security authorities wanted to stop the CCSD movement, they had to arrest doctors from all opposition political parties as well as independents – and some of those arrested were members of the National Congress.

The CCSD strategy contrasts with that of the "Legitimate Sudanese Doctors Syndicate" adopted since the Inqaz Coup in 1989. The syndicate's activities since the coup have depended on direct political discourse calling for the mobilization of doctors to overthrow the regime. The syndicate has been constantly present in opposition political alliances close to political movements. It stayed largely far from doctors and their issues, especially the junior interns, residents, registrars and specialists, which formed the basis of the dispute between the CCSD and the Syndicate. Since the beginning of the October strike in 2016, the syndicate and its members had pushed for escalating the demands of doctors and the demands of the strike towards calling for the overthrow of the regime. Meanwhile, the CCSD remained firmly committed to professional issues, as the first basis for achieving cohesion

and unity among doctors.

That dispute culminated in parallel with the calls for civil disobedience in November of 2016. The Syndicate was pushing hard for the CCSD to endorse the disobedience call and to urge doctors to strike to overthrow the regime. When the CCSD disagreed, the Syndicate went as far as to accuse the CCSD and its members of treason. This created controversy across various media for doctors. It was clear at the time for the CCSD that taking such a step would be burning an important milestone. It would be sacrificing doctors, their cohesion, and the organization that had been achieved, even without a union incubator or an alliance capable of addressing such a huge task.

### More Alliances, More Challenges

Since late November 2016, the CCSD had launched serious talks with the Democratic Lawyers Alliance and the Sudanese Journalists Network to enhance and bolster coordination and cooperation on common issues, especially after the lawyers and journalists had stood in solidarity with doctors in October and November and provided valued support for media and legal needs.

The first joint meeting among the three entities was held in December 2016. Efforts continued until they culminated in an agreement on the need to enhance, bolster, and develop coordination through joint methods to address shared issues among the three groups and the union space in general. The first draft of the joint pact named "Freedom of Union Action Defense Pact" was a subject of consensus among all stakeholders as a basis for engagement with other proposed entities for a strategic joint union alliance.

After the first quarter of 2017, action decreased considerably on the union alliance project for several reasons, namely the regular absence of representatives from meetings. It is important to make a very clear observation here about public action in Sudan in general. There is always unmatched excessive enthusiasm in the beginning; however, as things progress, extreme slackening and impatience arise, especially in uneventful times. The aforementioned entities' response was strong. However, their interaction soon faded.

This stems from civilian activists in Sudan always wasting precious hours of work, planning and organization to then suddenly be faced with the need to do so much in so little time in response to an emergency requiring action. This would lead to lower quality results had they utilized the long quiet times to bolster action. This phenomenon requires further study. I believe it is more personal and individualistic than specifically linked to collective public action.

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Moreover, people engaged in public action for a long period of organizing and planning are few. Most of them act in sudden surges. Efforts quickly rise like a wave only to come crashing to a complete halt soon after.

### **The Establishment of the Union Alliance**

Joint action was again resumed with the establishment of the Union Alliance in late 2017 whereby the Teacher's Committee was added as a fourth in the quartet. This time, work progressed in a regular, organized and graduated manner and culminated in the declaration of the Sudanese Professional Association (SPA) in July 2018 composed of eight different unions and professional entities.

Through its brief experience in 2015 and its role in the December 2018 uprising, the CCSD and the SPA proved that organized, gradual grassroots-based action can only reap positive results. The CCSD was the most organized among SPA members and the best equipped with communication and media capacities (namely social media), which explains the greater presence of CCSD members in SPA press offices. The CCSD's gradual progression from professional and sectoral demands that were important to all doctors was met with the regime negotiating, giving promises, failing to deliver and even trying to crush the movement by arresting more than 100 doctors. This pushed the CCSD to escalate its demands and call for the removal of the regime. Overall, this strategy laid the foundation for a smooth transition from professional to political demands calling for the overthrowing of the regime and the building of democracy.

## 3. Bylaws, Structure, Charter, and Plan (SPA Internal Structuring)

### SPA Preparatory Bureau

The SPA preparatory bureau was established in early 2018 and included representatives from five unions and professional associations: the CCSD, the Lawyers Democratic Alliance, the Sudanese Journalists Network, the Teachers Committee, and the Veterinarians Association. The stakeholders had agreed on the need to form a union alliance to support the concepts of union solidarity and achieve common objectives. The preparatory bureau was tasked with declaring the establishment of a union alliance by:

- Preparing the Charter of the alliance;
- Preparing the organizational structure and bylaws;
- Attracting more parallel unions and independent associations to join the alliance.

### Charter and the Regime Overthrow

The preparatory bureau drafted and finalized the Charter, which had undergone several amendments and additions, especially as more entities joined the coordination process. There was no conflict among the various stakeholders around the provisions of the charter, except for one issue. Some entities were trying to push political agendas of changing the regime in the Charter's objectives and plans, while the CCSD and the other entities were highlighting the need to prioritize professional and union affairs, over changing the regime and to only put that in terms of the alliance's contributions to

supporting the Sudanese people's causes and actions.

This clash stemmed from the differences between the entities making up the alliance. For instance, the Democratic Lawyers Alliance is a straightforward political movement made up of professional lawyers associations from opposition political parties. On the other hand, the CCSD was a largely professional and advocacy entity that did not have any political representation. These differences were addressed in the Charter, which stipulated that the alliance would support the Sudanese grassroots movement, reiterating union solidarity with all constituents. The charter also stated that SPA as a coalition will stand in solidarity with each of its components in their specific sectoral professional issues and demands and that in general, it adopts them but without detailing or outlining them.

In addition to the five constituent bodies, the preparatory bureau was able to recruit three more entities from January to July 2018. These were namely the Legitimate Sudanese Doctors Syndicate, the Initiative to Retake the Engineers Union, and the University Professors Association, which was a new entity that the preparatory bureau contributed to establish. By coordinating with some members who teach at Khartoum university, the preparatory bureau had invited a number of university professors through direct contact or personal acquaintance to a meeting where the objectives of the association to be founded were explained along with the need for an entity that advocates for university professors. In the second meeting attended by a sizable number of professors, the University Professors Associations preparatory committee was elected. They then signed the charter and engaged in daily actions to establish the alliance.

## SPA Structure and Horizontal Organization

The SPA structure was organized at two levels: the Council and the Executive Secretariat. The SPA Council is the legislating supervisory authority and the core of the alliance. It includes two representatives from each entity and a third backup member. At the time of its establishment in July 2018, the SPA included 16 members from eight entities. The Council elects and appoints the Executive Secretariat which is responsible for the executive functions of the structure. It comprises six members: one rapporteur, and others who are in charge of the media, treasury, legal, organizational, and events bureaus. In addition to the heads, each bureau also included delegates of each SPA entity. The structure was detailed and identified the powers and relations of all tiers through bylaws that were adopted at the SPA Council meeting along with the charter and the plan.

Before the SPA structure was adopted, there was a discussion around its nature: the known vertical executive structure made up of a president, a secretary, etc., versus the other adopted organizational format of a horizontal structure that sets all members of the SPA executive leadership almost at the same level. This horizontal structure would become common later on among most revolutionary entities such as the Alliance of Freedom and Change (AFC) and the Resistance Committees.

The SPA's horizontal organizational format created several advantages. It mitigated disputes in the early stages around the membership of the Secretariat and the bureaus. It also allowed for a shadow executive leadership that helped thwart attempts by security agencies to disrupt the SPA with arrests. Furthermore, it enshrined democratic practices, consultations, and discussions within the Secretariat, thus preventing any Secretariat member from monopolizing any decision.

Surely, the lack of a president or secretary prevented specific individuals from wielding magnified powers. Therefore, the horizontal organizational format had become a key precaution against potential fragmentation, division, and monopoly over future decisions and directions within the alliance.

Since the start of December 2018, the Executive Secretariat had agreed to develop a shadow secretariat which is an undeclared replacement executive authority in charge of taking over SPA executive action in case of a security attack resulting in the arrest of SPA secretariat members. The shadow secretariat was formed by having every original Secretariat member select another member from the other two alternates belonging to the same entity sitting on the Council, and sharing various dossiers that they had been

tackling. The rapporteur is the only Secretariat member to know all the members of the shadow secretariat. They were also entrusted with undertaking the same protocol, including handing over the names of the shadow secretariat members.

By establishing a shadow secretariat, the SPA was able to overcome the violent attacks led by the Al-Bashir regime following the start of the December Uprising. Four out of six Secretariat members were arrested, along with several Council members, and many more members from the various entities.

However, the shadow secretariat took charge directly after the arrest of the rapporteur, thus enabling the alliance to carry on with action, with limited impact on its activities and effectiveness due to the arrests.

The SPA plan and strategy, developed over several workshops in cooperation with Wa'ey Organization, relied on the charter's objectives which were actioned into a full year of activities. The primary goal was to expand the SPA organizational base by recruiting more entities, bolstering existing constituents, and building new entities in sectors and fields lacking any union activity.

Although overthrowing the regime remained a goal that many members believed the SPA could help achieve, it was considered a future issue where the union alliance could play a key role. However, it required better organizational capacities than the SPA had at the time since most entities were struggling with poor organization and experiences, except a few effective and active entities with a strong base.

## SPA Internal Dynamics

### Negotiations with the Transition Military Council and Fraying Trust

Since its inception, the SPA has included various unions and professional associations from multiple and diverse political backgrounds. In the early days, action relied extensively on individual and direct trust among the members. The individual and direct relationship stemming from the preparatory secretariat's continuous work was key to preserving cohesion and managing political differences and conflicts. The preparatory secretariat later became the SPA Executive Secretariat.

This solid foundation underpinned by direct trust among Secretariat members and various members and structures within the SPA did not last long, especially following the start of negotiations with the transition Military Council. The differences deepened further between political constituents around how to approach the negotiations, and how to manage the transition process and its priority tasks.

## Differences Among Political Parties

Historically, unions in Sudan have long provided key political leverage to the Sudanese Communist Party, the Islamic Charter Front, or the Political Islam Movement in general. These parties were able to expand their power and influence in Sudan by integrating and influencing unions and professional associations, especially in light of a Sudanese political reality almost exclusively dominated by sectarian traditional parties (the unionist Party supported by the Khatmiyya Section, and the Umma Party supported by the Ansar Sect). These are parties whose presence and organized activity in the union movement were barely negligible.

I believe it is important to highlight this issue as a fundamental point along the path of union action in Sudan. Observers would notice that the rise of union action has almost constantly been linked to political dossiers regarding change of power. This is not a problem in itself. However, the issue lies in it constantly being used as the basis for organizing and union alliances and is influenced by some or all political parties. Throughout Sudanese history, cases of unions organizing with the focus on professional causes independently from power struggle-related political agendas have been very few. This may be the reason for the lack of an entrenched union alliance in Sudan - a factor which has encouraged political regimes to want to control unions or reduce their influence.

Attempts to politically influence the SPA actions and decisions escalated during the time of signing the constitutional document and well after. However, these attempts to politically sway the SPA decisions were even noticeable directly after the start of the uprising. A group of SPA members belonging to various professional associations and unions started coordinating their activities based on political affiliations to influence the SPA's decisions and serve their parties' agendas and interests. They also sought to enable party affiliates to rise to the ranks to leadership positions in the SPA and the Forces of Freedom and Change (FFC)

This discovery was a turning point in the SPA journey. After

this incident, the SPA was no longer the same. New internal dynamics emerged and were controlled by one issue: who would be controlling the SPA decisions? As a result, a counter-coordination group was also formed and comprised members of professional associations from different political backgrounds with the sole aim to stop swaying the SPA to support a particular party. This situation yielded long and pointless discussions, disrupted structures, and created a toxic environment plagued with uncertainty and mistrust. Everyone was focused on increasing their numbers separately to control the majority. In this context, basing decision-making in an alliance on majority numbers would be a grave mistake.

## The surge in Numbers in Affiliated Entities and the Challenge of the SPA Administration

This turmoil was reflected in all SPA discussions, having become completely politicized and with limited talks on union affairs. This has also impacted the organizational situation of newly founded entities joining the SPA. The key factor was always the new entity's effect on internal blocs rather than its eligibility and right to join. The dramatic surge of affiliated entities – from eight in December 2018 to 18 in May 2019 – posed a great management challenge to the SPA and its structures. Entities joined without special consideration to the founding or most influential constituents. As a result, all entities and delegates had equal footing in the SPA Council and other structures – despite great differences in capacities and capabilities to act and influence. While some SPA constituents had great reach and could organize a successful strike, for example, others failed to even name delegates to the SPA's various structures and bureaus – i.e., no more than eight members. This is also a recurring problem in the Sudanese political context and is closely linked to the issue of using unions as a means in the struggle for political power. After the successful uprising, numerous “sham” entities were established, making it difficult to differentiate between real union projects and new entities created for political influence and advancement.

## 4. From Inception to the Declaration of Freedom and Change and Leading the Uprising: The Wages Dossier

The FFC was founded when Sudanese masses arose in late 2018 with a principal motivation – at least personally – which is to provide political cover to the spontaneous movement. It drew from the recent memory of crowds protesting in September 2013, unfortunately without political cover. This contributed to quickly suppressing any dissent with extreme violence. In early 2018, political forces tried to organize an alliance (the Sudanese Opposition Forces Alliance) to lead protests but failed to do so; they soon lost effectiveness and protests faded with time.

In early 2018, a group of civil stakeholders announced the “Declaration of Freedom and Dignity,” a statement that conceptualized key democratic transformation issues. It was later developed into the Declaration and Alliance of Freedom and Change. The Declaration of Freedom and Dignity had not established a way to achieve democratic transformation and affect change. Revolutionary forces did not know if they should negotiate with the existing authority or launch a peaceful revolution. At the time, Sudanese opposition was divided into two camps: one seeing the potential for change through negotiations with the existing authority (i.e. those represented by the Sudan Call Forces), and another (represented by the National Consensus Forces) voicing its rejection of any possibility for change through dialogue and negotiations.

Therefore, the Declaration of Freedom and Dignity (known as Hirak) remained silent on tools of change and focused on the issues of change instead in order to find common ground to gather opposition groups. Indeed, I believe that Hirak – which I was at one time responsible for managing its media presence

– has laid good foundations for the Declaration of Freedom and Change. Most opposition leaders had read and signed it, although it failed to achieve its objective of amassing many Sudanese signatures. This led to losing effectiveness and gradually fading away.

Meanwhile, at the CCSD – in coordination with several unions and professional associations – we were hard at work in preparation to announce the establishment of the Sudanese Professional Association as a professional and union alliance that protects the principles of professional and union solidarity.

The SPA was officially announced in mid-July 2018 after the charter, bylaws, and detailed year-long action plan were agreed upon. The plan mainly focused on consecrating the SPA’s status as a primary union alliance in Sudan and enhancing grassroots support through organizational activities seeking to bolster the SPA’s internal structures and solidarity to be able to build new professional entities in other key sectors. Therefore, the agreed slogan was “We remain united. Enough parody”, a quote from a famous poem by the late Youssef Mostafa Al-Teni.

While most of the other activities centered on raising awareness and mobilizing grassroots endorsement, the SPA planned to organize a series of activities for the rest of the year tackling the issue of wages. A comprehensive study was conducted on wages in Sudan, with comparisons between the minimum wage, poverty line, and the cost of living, and called for raising the minimum wage to adequate standards. The SPA chose wages as the first cause to address because

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it is a shared public issue affecting all those working for the state and in other sectors. The plan was to lobby the government to raise the unjust minimum wage, which had not been changed since 2013, after a long series of events, media campaigns, protests, and direct meetings with political parties, among others. According to the plan, the activities would culminate in December during the final budget discussions in parliament. The SPA was supposed to lead a large march towards parliament calling for improving the minimum wage.

SPA officials were surely thinking about changing the regime and the political contribution to a peaceful revolution. However, we believed we could provide meaningful contributions at least one year after establishing the SPA and undertaking intensive organizational action in order to make the SPA a strong, disciplined alliance with reach in various professional sectors across Sudan.

In mid-December, peaceful and spontaneous protests were spreading across multiple Sudanese states. We started discussing the need to provide a political cover to this movement to avoid a September 2013 scenario and to prevent wasting the efforts of the Sudanese people. We quickly talked about drafting a declaration for the revolution stating its overall objectives. This declaration could provide a basis to build a large-scale political front that could lead the movement and achieve its goals. The focus was mainly on the Declaration of Freedom and Dignity since it was known and agreed upon by most political forces. After contacting the Hirak initiative and making some amendments, it was developed into the Declaration of Freedom and Change draft and shared for review, adjustments, and approval with all political forces and opposition civil stakeholders, including all armed groups.

At the same time, the SPA had called for a march towards parliament on 25 December 2018 to demand raising the minimum wage as the last event in its plan regarding wages. Once the invitation was issued and for almost 5 days, things escalated quickly. On 19 December, even before the scheduled march, heavy crowds took to the streets in Atbara, north of Sudan. The ruling party's building was burnt and several people were killed. This protest was a turning point that prompted the various SPA constituents to change course immediately towards overthrowing the regime and to contribute to coordinating, organizing, and leading the masses. Indeed, the SPA issued a decision to change the destination of the 25 December march from parliament to the presidential palace to topple the regime. It called upon all parties to engage and participate. The doctors' strike was then announced as the first professional strike initiated by the SPA; it lasted more than 200 days and was only lifted in July 2019.

At this time, the SPA had shared the draft of the Declaration

for Freedom and Change with political opposition and civil actors to clarify proposed amendments to the charter before signing. Some political forces were suspicious and very unappreciative of the SPA's efforts and, therefore, did not treat the draft declaration with the seriousness it required. Others worked to create an alliance similar to the Sudanese opposition forces alliance in early 2018. A statement was issued then on behalf of the Sudanese Uprising Coordination Committee and signed by most opposition forces. The statement bore the signature of the SPA without SPA approval or notification. The SPA had rejected such alliances because they were slow, too loose and ill-suited to lead the revolution.

Therefore, the 25 December and 31 December marches, which were called for by the SPA, had exclusively placed enormous pressure on political forces. They also contributed to the agreement and signing of the Declaration for Freedom and Change by key opposition political and civil actors, including the Sudan Call Forces, the opposition Unionist Alliance, the National Consensus bloc, and the Civil Actors Association. The signatories also adopted the coordination structure set by the SPA. After the declaration was signed, a flexible coordination committee was formed for the Forces for Freedom and Change; it was an executive body with limited representation and empowered to make swift consensual decisions. This allowed the Forces for Freedom and Change to lead the glorious December 2018 Revolution which overthrew Al-Bashir on 11 April 2019.

Before the first march called for by the SPA on 25 December 2018, the preliminary nucleus of the Forces for Freedom and Change field committee was formed. The SPA Events Bureau was tasked with developing and implementing a field plan for the march, as well as engaging with political forces to include them in field organization. The Sudanese Congress Party, Unionist alliance, and Communist Party were contacted through delegates in addition to Bureau members at the SPA structures. The plan deployed professional and political party cadres in specific locations and streets. First aid and medical supplies were provided by medical bodies and others. This approach was adopted by the Forces for Freedom and Change at a larger scale and with different tactics when organizing mass marches in Sudan.

The Forces for Freedom and Change field committee and the SPA Events Bureau had pivotal and effective contributions to organizing and scheduling protests, as well as linking revolutionary groups on the ground. They also had the biggest role in establishing and spreading resistance and neighborhood committees in Khartoum and other states. While some committees existed before the revolution, their wider reach after the revolution was the result of the SPA calls, organizing efforts, and direct engagement led by the field committee. The direct connection between political affiliates in the FFC and the professional affiliates was key to creating the cores of resistance committees in various

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areas. All organizing efforts were influenced by personal trust and knowledge of people and groups – especially given the security threat and the regime’s ability to infiltrate groups and assert control.

### Signs of Division

Since the fall of al-Bashir on 11 April, most SPA efforts were focused on preserving the unity of the Alliance of Freedom and Change until the signing of the Constitutional Document. They also focused on developing unified and joint positions and ending the internal and public conflict among the various components of the Alliance. Although SPA’s internal crisis was deepening – especially after records of the Communist Party’s internal bloc were leaked – the main focus was on saving the Forces of Freedom and Change from division. Protesters were sitting in front of the buildings of the army general command and the Forces of Freedom and Change were trying to negotiate with the leaders of the Military Council to impose conditions that ensure a democratic transition.

During this period, constituents of the Alliance of Freedom and Change started issuing individual public statements against each other. It started with the Communist Party’s statement that attacked the Sudanese Congress Party and the National Umma Party, in objection to the first meeting held by Forces of Freedom and Change with the Military Council. The statement accused them specifically of deliberate efforts to make it miss the meeting. Then, the Sudanese Congress Party responded with a statement denying the accusation and ensuring that no

party deliberately wanted to push any Alliance member out of meetings and claimed it was a matter of poor coordination and delay in attendance by the Communist Party. This incident set off a series of inflammatory statements among FFC members. At the SPA, we spent a lot of time at the various parties’ headquarters, trying to preserve the FFC and mitigate the dispute, especially in public statements.

The SPA continued its activities until the Constitutional Document was signed. It had two main roles: to contribute to the cohesion of the masses and ensure they stand behind the goals of the revolution and the FFC, and to maintain the cohesion and unity of the FFC itself. Given these tasks, the SPA paid little attention to internal cohesion, while internal crises and tensions kept escalating without any action to address them.

One key problem was the steady and sizable expansion of SPA members. Upon its announcement in July 2018, the SPA started with eight bodies. By the time the revolution began and after the fall of al-Bashir, the SPA included many entities – up to 18 different professional associations and unions in May 2019. This huge surge in membership was not backed by organizational development or alignment. The SPA organizational structures remained unchanged, which led to massive organizational regression. Executive tasks gradually shifted from the Executive Secretariat to the SPA Council. Given the complexity and seriousness of the issues and dossiers, the 36-member Council held long meetings and became a source of delay in SPA action and development.



## 5. How and Why Did the SPA Succumb to Divisions?

The SPA divisions occurred in mid-2020, after long periods of suspended action. Following multiple failed attempts to avoid the worst-case scenario – what was anticipated did happen. This was the true beginning of divisions within the mass movement and all revolutionary actors.

The crisis of leaked recordings was the precursor of division and started growing feelings of mistrust among various SPA components, triggering an internal realignment based on party affiliation, which was somewhat of an open secret. On the one hand, there was the Communist Party camp, made famous by the leaked recordings, and on the other hand, a counter-camp comprising the rest of the components who coordinated efforts to thwart the Communist Party's monopoly efforts of SPA decisions and directions. Being a multi-political affiliation group, it was naturally not organized with many members frequently changing. However, the opposing group was better prepared and organized with a greater capacity to work in one movement.

The leaked recording was not, of course, the only reason that led to the SPA division. The division occurred because of several other reasons, too. I believe the SPA's greatest mistake was its poor judgment of the limits of the political roles it played or should have played.

At the time, the SPA – a union alliance that had not yet celebrated its first anniversary – suddenly stood before colossal political responsibilities and great public expectations. However, it lacked the internal structures to address them, hence drowning in daily political and transition issues and neglecting to adequately develop its

organizational structures. More dangerous was the lack of agreement among constituents on the SPA's political role in the transition process and the type of decisions and issues it should or could discuss and decide on. These matters were expected to be settled immediately after the fall of al-Bashir. Instead, they were set aside over and over again with continuous attempts to avoid the worst-case scenario and to reduce tensions among the various components.

Since the SPA had not clearly defined the boundaries of its political role, it was pulled in on all political issues and dossiers. With time, it was required to express an opinion on issues on which it had no common stance. As a result, its Council was almost in permanent session. Given the different issues and the diverse political affiliations of its members, they argued constantly over the economy, peace, and other urgent and complex daily matters.

The SPA was also marred by a pivotal internal dispute over the alliance's very legitimacy. The SPA was a temporary union alliance of independent (parallel) unions that were established under a security crackdown that weakened its structures in terms of institutional commitment and internal democracy.

Some components were calling for a gradual transition to democratic legitimacy by transforming SPA constituents into democratically elected unions. However, others believed that the SPA should continue drawing from revolutionary legitimacy until after the transition period for various reasons. I was a strong advocate for the first stance simply because I thought that the SPA's power and capacity to influence would

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gradually erode over time. Being originally a union alliance, I believed it cannot go beyond its primary task of establishing, bolstering, and promoting unions in different work sectors.

The SPA initially consisted of eight independent professional bodies representing seven professions, namely doctors, teachers, university professors, engineers, veterinarians, lawyers, and journalists. It continued its activities with the same membership until the end of the year. Following the start of the revolution, it began admitting many other entities based on loose organizational conditions and reviews. As such, SPA constituents increased in April 2019 to more than 15 bodies. This surge in numbers was not paired with any development in the internal structures and decision-making processes. This triggered a major organizational crisis.

The admission of new entities and the naming of their representatives in the SPA structures were a subject of internal dispute as opposing blocs tried to gain the upper hand. This conviction canceled the SPA's consensual character, which it had taken on after leading the Sudanese Revolution based on the need to always be able to reflect the various political and social opinions of the Sudanese people, in case it wished to pursue its key role as a driving force towards democracy and its consolidation.

This false conviction yielded a big mistake: elections as a process for selecting SPA's new executive leadership. I am as equally responsible for this mistake as other SPA members. There were many drivers behind this decision, including poor executive performance, internal tension, security reservations, and the need to change the SPA executive leadership and replace it with a new one. As a result, I tendered my resignation in February 2020 to achieve this change without destroying the SPA. Despite this pressing need to change and replace the executive leadership, going about it without considering the SPA's allied and consensual nature was a huge mistake that was unavoidable despite the relentless efforts.

### Lessons Learned

The SPA's key value during the December Revolution resided in its ability to unite the broad political and social spectrum of the Sudanese people in their endeavor to overthrow the regime through several methods and tactics. Indeed, before this, any union and joint actions among these actors were close to impossible. Moreover, the decision and timing to shift the SPA's course towards contributing to leading the revolution were decisive and crucial. The shift allowed the SPA to answer the grassroots need for leadership and coordination and forced all the opposition civil components to sit at one table represented by the Alliance of Freedom and Change. The tactics used by SPA to call for demonstrations on 25 and 31 December 2018 and the success of these marches,

had a significant impact on the political forces signing of the Declaration of Freedom and Change.

Moreover, the SPA organizational arrangements and its various structures allowed it to overcome the growing crackdown from Sudanese security agencies. Despite the dozens of arrests of its leadership, the SPA continued its work undeterred; it remained active throughout the Sudanese revolution until the fall of al-Bashir. This proved that the SPA's horizontal structure as well as the brilliantly executed shadow structures to be extremely successful, which facilitated the transition of leadership and prevented the disruption of the alliance. It is also important to point out that the effectiveness of the SPA was also impacted due to security breaches. At least one SPA member was expelled from its various structures and later dismissed by his professional body based on indications linking him to a security breach from internal and external foreign parties. In addition, other security infiltrations remained unresolved.

The SPA also provided an advanced experience in the revolution's media action led by the relentless work of the SPA Press Bureau. The Press Bureau started small, with limited staff, but soon expanded during the revolution to include a large number of different groups. This included speakers and spokespersons inside and outside Sudan, editors, statement writers, graphic designers, and social media managers. As such, the Press Bureau was able to address everyone in classical and dialectal Arabic – even in Rendòk, a Sudanese street dialect.

The SPA Events Office and the Field Committee of the Forces of Freedom and Change were among the most important tools of the December Revolution. They engaged the most with the masses, in terms of organizing protests, their spots and routes, actively and directly participating in the establishment of resistance and neighborhood committees, and other grassroots activities where the Field Committee was key. Certainly, the committee's value and capacities stemmed from its members being operationally active representatives of political parties and professional groups, which certainly created a big difference in the nature and dynamics of the mass movement.

During the gradual progression of the SPA, everyone knew that these bodies could not replace the unions that stemmed from general elections, but were rather parallel bodies to the unions made by the Inqaz regime. They had structured and developed themselves under exceptional circumstances of state-organized repression and the closing of the public space.

Throughout the SPA experience, no one claimed that the entities within the alliance replaced the unions elected from the bases. However, there was a clear disagreement between two main visions: those who believed that the representation

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of professional bases should gradually move towards electoral legitimacy through elected unions, and those who believed that the SPA should continue with revolutionary legitimacy even if the elected unions were properly formed. This fundamental dispute went unresolved and constituted a major obstacle to SPA actions. The legitimacy of the entities themselves began to gradually erode, especially as the public space started to reopen after the revolution. This was particularly true for entities that did not start and did not discuss any measures to elect the professional or sectoral union they represent.

I believe that the election and establishment of trade unions were supposed to be the top priority for the SPA following the signing of the Constitutional Document. Working together to achieve this goal would have changed the course of the SPA itself and would have largely prevented the disastrous trajectory that followed.

### Limits of SPA's Political Role

The SPA embarked on direct political action and influence through its contribution to the leadership of the glorious December revolution and the Declaration of Freedom and Change. The Declaration identified the overthrow of the regime via civilian methods as a central goal and the establishment of a transitional period that paves the way for democratic transformation in Sudan. After the fall of al-Bashir, the SPA was confronted with huge and unlimited tasks. Given its then-central position within the Alliance of Freedom and Change and for the masses, it felt obliged to answer many issues that were beyond the agreed-upon tasks and agenda. I think that the SPA's failure to set limits on the political role that it could, or should play, was one of its major downfalls. Even worse was the strange and distorted position taken by the SPA. While it decided not to participate in the sovereign or executive authority, the SPA was discussing and making decisions on almost all executive files, issuing statements, and holding press conferences to pressure the transitional

authority whose members were mostly nominated and selected by the SPA. Discussing political matters and making so many decisions contributed to the rise of ideological and partisan differences within the SPA members regarding various economic, social, and political files.

These positions also contributed to the SPA stepping away from its basic roles of building and strengthening trade unions and their roles in representation, advocacy, and social protection. Its involvement in political matters marginalized union issues. The SPA did not remain unified for long as the division occurred nearly nine months after signing the Constitutional Document and the beginning of the transitional period. However, with hindsight, it would have been better for the SPA to directly define and establish the political role it would play during the transitional period. It could have been a general role focused on converging views among FFC components to pressure the authorities and actors to commit to achieving the goals set in the Declaration of Freedom and Change and the Constitutional document. It would concentrate its efforts on building trade unions and strengthening the capabilities of civil society in general. This would have been the role that the SPA could adequately play, given the approval it gained and its proximity to all components. There were many initiatives in this context, including:

- The Government Performance Support and Follow-up Mechanism, which aimed at supporting and following up on the government's executive performance in various sectors. This was done by forming working groups that include professionals and experts in each field, and by creating direct links with government institutions and their executive leaders.
- The Democratic Transition Platform is a collective think-tank whose aim was to gather representatives of all political and revolutionary components and experts to discuss the main issues of transition, identify points of agreement and disagreement, then formulate agreed programs of action, and finally rally collective pressure and coordinated action to push for their implementation.

## 6. The Future of Trade Union Alliances in Sudan

The SPA crisis and its division were a great shock to the union movement in particular, and civil society in Sudan in general. However, it did not stop efforts to build and organize unions. Despite all difficulties and challenges that plague Sudan today – namely the 25 October coup and its aftermath – the future of union action remains bright and promising. Legitimate and accepted trade union alliances have played indispensable roles in the path of transition and democratic transformation in Sudan.

Last year, the overthrown transitional government ratified ILO Conventions No. 87 on freedom of association and protection of the right to organize and Convention No. 144 on tripartite consultations, paving the way for organized union action without the need for any local government legislation or laws.

Today, many groups are active in trade union settings with various political and partisan backgrounds. These groups can generally be divided into two blocs. The first includes revolutionary and democratic forces that comprise all the union forces that contributed to leading the December Revolution. While they agree on the principles of democracy and civil rule, they disagree politically and ideologically on many issues, which may positively lead to union pluralism and multiple union configurations in the same sector or work field. However, this could have a very negative impact on the unions' ability to organize and contribute to overthrowing the military coup and achieving a democratic transition. The second bloc comprises the remnants of the government unions associated with the defunct regime, which seeks to restore its union presence through a rapprochement with

the current military authority (it can be noted that this group could become more organized in the future).

Among the major disadvantages resulting from the defeated transitional experience were the union steering committees appointed by the authorities. Despite understandable justifications for taking this step in terms of the need to preserve the unions' assets, conduct their work and obligations, and besiege the unions of the former regime and their movements, many of these committees had started gradually transforming to perform direct union tasks. I think that the appointed steering committees significantly delayed and disrupted union construction and organization and contributed to divisions in the democratic union movement that led the December Revolution. It has also become a large battleground for partisan conflicts. All political party components were prompted to nominate people affiliated with the trade union steering committees – this was an incomprehensible and unjustified act. In their conditions, this did not provide any significant gain but rather imposed an additional burden on political forces that were already exhausted from major and momentous transition tasks.

Producing a revolutionary union alliance that can contribute to leading the masses towards overthrowing the coup and achieving democratic transition is dominating the thoughts of many actors in the union field. It is also an attempt to recreate the union alliance experiences that led or contributed to leading the popular revolutions, eventually bringing down three military dictatorships in 1964, 1985, and 2019. However, perhaps we should also think of an important question: why did all these union experiences and all that

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great union momentum and history in Sudan fail to continue and maintain a continuous and coherent alliance experience? I think that the huge authoritarian political burdens were the reason for the continuous collapse and failure of these experiences.

The dictatorships and military regimes that ruled the country for more than 50 years of the modern independent State of Sudan contributed greatly to the weakening of organizing and civil action. The union movement endured a lot – especially under the Islamic Front regime, which became so entrenched in the country after the 1989 coup, dissolved and took control of unions, and proceeded to persecute, displace, kill, and torture unionists. However, the directions taken by the union alliances, especially in periods of transition and under short-lived democracies, often put unionists at the heart of the partisan political power struggles. They were constantly stuck between the party movements – especially ideological parties – on both the right and the left. Trade union alliances that are independent of political power struggles and that seek to achieve their own agendas have never taken shape throughout the history of Sudan - the sort of alliances that could have been an important pressure tool, especially in the difficult and unpredictable moments of democratic transition.

The union movement in Sudan needs to find an independent foothold from parties. Indeed, Sudanese civil society and Sudan itself share this need. Dedicated masses of the December Revolution, who still fill the streets, seek to see Sudan on the path of democratic transformation. What is needed is a union movement that is established primarily

on the social and economic issues of its members, with strong institutional and representative legitimacy, and that is openly democratic and unequivocally in its stand against totalitarian and dictatorial rule. Such a union movement should contribute to leading all the masses against oppressive regimes. However, it must know the limits of its political roles and should never lose sight of it in times of transition and democracy, given its unparalleled ability to provide oversight and pressure on all political actors, bringing them together during the challenges of laying the foundations for democratic transition.

With escalating union-building efforts in many sectors in Sudan today, I hope that we learn our lessons well and become aware of the importance of preserving our civil institutions and union organization by keeping them away from partisan conflicts as much as possible. We must also understand that attempts to sway them in favor of one party or political movement would surely lead to their demise, costing them the ability to influence the public political sphere and gradually losing their influence and effectiveness among their own members. In the near future, I believe we could see the forming of one or more strategic long-term alliances with extended influence and effectiveness. These alliances would provide a cornerstone for the Sudanese civil society, its activities, effectiveness, as well as its aspirations towards building a modern democratic state. In addition to achieving their independence and clearly defining their political roles, they would need to move beyond temporary and parallel union bodies and more towards legitimate and established union organizations with large bases.

## **Annexes** **(all in Arabic)**

Annex 1: [The Charter for Defending the Freedom of Union Action- December 2016](#)

(A joint charter that was agreed upon but not announced between the Central Committee of Sudan Doctors, the Democratic Lawyers Alliance, and the Sudanese Journalists Network).

Annex 2: [The SPA Charter - announced in July 2018](#)

Annex 3: [SPA Action Plan - Not announced, agreed and internally approved in July 2018](#)

Annex 4: [SPA Study on Wages in Sudan - November 2018](#)

Annex 5: [Statement on Change of Location and Nature of the 23 December - 25 December 2018 protests](#)

Annex 6: [Declaration of Freedom and Change – 1 January 2019](#)

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### About the Arab Reform Initiative

The Arab Reform Initiative is an independent Arab think tank working with expert partners in the Middle East and North Africa and beyond to articulate a home-grown agenda for democratic change and social justice. It conducts research and policy analysis and provides a platform for inspirational voices based on the principles of diversity, impartiality, and gender equality.

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