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SUBJECT: Opening of the Sudan Parliament

The first national parliament in the history of the Sudan was opened on January 1, 1954 by Sir Robert Howe, Governor General of the Sudan. In an impressive ceremony at Parliament House the invited guests assembled first. These hundred and fifty guests consisted of leading personalities in the Sudan, community leaders, senior Government officials, members of the Executive Council, the Governor General's Commission, foreign liaison officers and tribal leaders. Sayed Abdel Rahman el Mahdi attended but Sayed Ali el Mirghani was unable to come because of ill health and sent his eldest son Sayed Mohammed Osman el Mirghani. The Governor General rode up in his red Rolls Royce accompanied by a mounted guard of honor. He inspected a Guard of Honor from the Camel Corps lined up in the yard of Parliament House. In the brilliant sunshine the various tribal dress mingled with ordinary European street wear and the total effect was colorful. The Public Relations Branch of the Sudan Government issued a release describing this scene and copies of it are attached as Enclosure No. 1 Unclassified.

After the members of Parliament had filed into their chamber the Senators were placed in the center of the house and the Governor General entered and delivered an address inaugurating the Sudan's first national parliament, (copies of the address are attached as enclosure No. 2). The guests then departed and the House of Representatives and the Senate met to consider the election of speakers for both houses.

Joseph Sweeney
 Joseph Sweeney,
 United States Liaison Officer.

Enclosures: Governor General's address on opening of Parliament January 1, 1954.
 Press Release describing ceremony of Parliament Inauguration

cc: London
 Cairo

UNCLASSIFIED

J.Sweeney:md
 REPORTER
 12 JAN 1954

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FEATURE No. 379

INAUGURATION OF SUDAN PARLIAMENT

Dateline: Khartoum, 1st Jany. 1954

In January, 1885, the spearmen of The Mahdi surged through the White Nile from Omdurman, overran the starving defenders of Khartoum and murdered General Gordon on the steps of his palace. Thirteen years later General Kitchener defeated the forces of The Khalifa outside Omdurman.

And on January 1st, 1954, the grandson of The Mahdi was among the members who attended the opening of the First Parliament of the Sudan and sons of The Khalifa among the distinguished visitors. Many of these members and visitors had come from Omdurman, no longer splashing through the Nile but sweeping across a bridge in glistening new saloons.

It was a colourful scene set against the buildings of the Senate and the House of Representatives, gleaming white in the bright winter sunshine. The crowds gathered early round the Parliament railings and on the roofs of the neighbouring buildings to watch the participants in the ceremony arrive.

There were the members, symbolising the diversities of the country where fifty-five years of British administration have created a nation when there was only a geographical expression. Members from the countryside, many wearing blue or crimson robes of honour with ceremonial swords; members representing the Beja who broke the British square; members of The Mahdi; members from the British square; members to save their ancestors from the south where Gordon had laboured the Gezira where British capital and enterprise have created the cotton-growing scheme on which the country's finances are based. Less colourful but politically more significant, the group of members in European dress, townsmen, many educated in the Gordon Memorial College - now the University College of Khartoum - or in the Kitchener School of Medicine. Some of the members had served in the Legislative Assembly; others in the Advisory Council, but the majority were new to the business of Government.

The visitors too were varied. Bishops and business men, politicians and pressmen. The heads of eight national communities, heads of Departments of Government, members of the Electoral Commission that had run democratic elections in a largely illiterate land, representatives of the armed forces of the Co-domini and of the Sudan Defence Force, liaison officers from four countries, retired Sudanese officials and notables from many walks of life: a group symbolical of a country where all people live together without racial prejudice and without colour bar. What were the thoughts in all these men's heads at this historic moment? The old men who had seen so many changes in their lifetime and wondering what new changes the future held; the young men with burning nationalist enthusiasm making light of practical difficulties; the older Sudanese officials realising the weight of responsibility that will rest on largely inexperienced shoulders in the new Parliament; the British officials proud of this culmination to which their life's work had been devoted but wondering if it had come too soon.

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Punctually at 9.30 entered the guard of honour of the Sudan Defence Force with band playing and marching with a precision that would have done credit to the Brigade of Guards. Then the Palace Guards in red fezzes and white uniforms.

When the guard had taken up position the Senators and Members of the House of Representatives entered their respective Chambers to hear their black-robed Clerks read the Governor-General's proclamation summoning Parliament; then returned to the porticos to watch the arrival of the most distinguished visitors.

First the Judges of the High Court, wigged and gowned, in solemn procession to the steps of the Senate. Then by car the British and Sudanese members of the Executive Council attending perhaps their last function together. Then the Chief Justice and the Grand Kadi. Then the members of the Governor-General's Commission with their Pakistani chairman. Then Sayed Abdel Rahman El Mahdi and Sayed Ali El Mirghani, the two great religious leaders of the northern Sudan.

Last of the distinguished visitors came Lady Howe, and then those waiting in the courtyard heard a clattering of hooves and the car of the Governor-General, Sir Robert Howe, slide into the courtyard with an escort of mounted police, the horses decorated with the elephant's head badge of Khartoum Province.

The Governor-General took the salute and inspected the guard and then walked up the steps of the House where he was welcomed by the Serjeant-at-Arms in blue and silver uniform who accompanied him to the Speaker's Office. The judges proceeded from the Senate to the House of Representatives and went to the Clerk's Office.

The visitors then ascended to the galleries. For some of them it was their first sight of the rectangular chamber, designed after the Westminster model, but painted pale cream with blue carpets and with a battery of fans hung from the ceiling. The Members entered and took their seats followed by the Senators who, led by their Clerk and the Deputy-Serjeant, filed in on either side of the Speaker's chair and took their seats in the centre of the Chamber.

After a short pause the Serjeant-at-Arms entered and called on all present to rise. The judges entered and took their places behind the Speaker's chair and the Chief Justice and Grand Kadi beside the dais. Once again the door-keepers in their uniform of blue and gold with white turbans opened the doors, and the Governor-General entered, followed by his British and Sudanese aides-de-camp, and mounted the dais.

The Governor-General then made his speech welcoming members and impressing upon them the onerous responsibilities of their duties and ended by bidding members of both House choose their Speakers. The speech was then translated into Arabic by the Clerk of the Senate.

After this translation the Governor-General left the Chamber with the judges who watched him depart followed by the guard of honour. And members and visitors left the Chamber and met in the inner court for refreshments. All the members were wearing badges with their names and constituencies and many visitors could be seen seeking out the

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Gentlemen,

Less than a year ago on the occasion of the signing of the Anglo-Egyptian Agreement on the Sudan, I said that the Sudanese people stood upon the threshold of Self-Government. *Today* the Sudanese cross that threshold and enter upon the last stage of their journey towards the goal of all freedom-loving people, the determination by them of their own future.

This great occasion marks the accomplishment of the first aim of the Anglo-Egyptian Agreement. It also marks the fulfilment of what has been the main purpose of the Sudan Government for 50 years. It gives me therefore great satisfaction and pride that it should fall to me to inaugurate the period of full Sudanese Self-Government by the opening of this first Sudan Parliament.

Except for the twenty nominated members of the Senate, this Parliament is made up of members elected from every part of the Sudan. To the voters of many constituencies the whole procedure of democratic elections was new and strange. Nevertheless and in spite of the practical difficulties of distance and climatic conditions, the size of the poll in most constituencies showed that the electorate generally had a real sense of their duties as citizens, and by their peaceful and orderly behaviour during the elections they proved themselves worthy to assume the great responsibility placed upon them.

The manner in which these elections were carried out is a very great tribute to the character of the Sudanese people and justifies the hope that the principles and institutions of democracy will take firm root in the Sudan. True parliamentary democracy cannot just be learned from a book or copied from some other country. Its institutions can be modelled on the example and experience of others, but they will not survive unless the people whom they serve are filled with the spirit of democracy, which is a way of life and not a set of rules.

I am sure that you would also wish me to express today the debt which the Sudan owes to the Chairman of the Electoral Commission, Mr. Sukumar Sen, and its members for the great service which they have rendered to the country by their admirable organisation and conduct of the elections, in spite of the many difficulties and problems which faced them. I must include in this tribute also the Sudanese officers of the Commission throughout the country who played such an important and valuable part in the elections by carrying out so efficiently and thoroughly the instructions of the Commission.

Gentlemen, as members of this Parliament you are about to undertake a very great responsibility, the government of your country. It will be the duty of the Council of Ministers, which will be constituted in accordance with the will of the majority of the House of Representatives, to formulate policy and to exercise the executive and administrative functions of government; but the

of the Co-domini and of the Sudanese officials and officers from four countries, retired Sudanese officials and notables from many walks of life: a group symbolical of a country where all people live together without racial prejudice and without colour bar. What were the thoughts in all these men's heads at this historic moment? The old men who had seen so many changes in their lifetime and wondering what new changes the future held; the young men with burning nationalist enthusiasm making light of practical difficulties; the older Sudanese officials realising the weight of responsibility that will rest on largely inexperienced shoulders in the new Parliament; the British officials proud of this culmination to which their life's work had been devoted but wondering if it had come too soon.

passes a resolution expressing its desire that arrangements for Self-Determination shall be put in motion. But as the Agreement recognises, Self-Determination is valueless unless it is conducted in an atmosphere of freedom and neutrality, where no external influence can be exerted upon the Sudanese when they make the choice of their future.

It will be a vital part of the duties of this Parliament, from the very beginning of its life, to ensure that nothing whatever is allowed to prevent or prejudice the existence of such an atmosphere. History and the Sudan will hold you to account for the manner in which you discharge this duty.

Gentlemen of the Senate, Gentlemen of the House of Representatives:

It being necessary that a Speaker for each House of Parliament be first chosen, you, Gentlemen of the Senate, will in due course repair to the place where you are to sit and will proceed to choose some proper person to be your Speaker. And you, Gentlemen of the House of Representatives, will in this place choose some proper person to be your Speaker: Thereafter the persons so chosen will present themselves for my approval at such time and such place as I shall thereafter appoint.

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