

# The Dam Building in Northern Sudan: Is it a Tool for the Resettlement of Millions of Egyptian Peasants? Is it a New Darfur Scenario in the Making?

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## Introduction

I will try to discuss the deteriorating situation in northern Sudan that has resulted from the policies of demographic engineering implemented by the government. The components of this policy are as follows: (a) building a series of dams in northern Sudan so as to evacuate the region and resettle the Nubians and Manasir and Amri-Hamdab people (i.e. the indigenous ethnic groups who are affected by the construction of the dams) far away from their home villages; (b) bringing in millions of Egyptian peasants to settle in the areas evacuated by the indigenous groups. The plan is being implemented in collaboration with the Egyptian government – it was the Egyptian government who first engendered this plan in its own Nubian region. It seems that this is not the first time the Khartoum government adopted such a policy – it was implemented in Darfur, leading to the crisis there. In the case of Darfur, a whole Arab nomadic tribe from Chad was welcomed into the region. It was armed and supported by the Sudanese government to eventually wreak havoc in Darfur (cf. Hashim, 2008).

My discussion will focus on four points. The first is to discuss the documents related to the plans of the Sudanese government to resettle millions of Egyptian peasants in the northern region. The second point is to try to answer the question of whether the dams already built (taking the High Dam in Aswan, Egypt, as a case) have brought any development to the affected Nubians after they were resettled far away from their home villages. The question raised here is whether the de-population of the region was the first phase of the present plan, which aims at re-populating it with Egyptian peasants brought from the delta of the Nile. The third point is to try to answer the question; why do the Nubians flatly reject building any more dams in northern Sudan? The fourth point is to see if the government of Sudan is ready to use violence against the indigenous people who defy its hideous plans to resettle them away from their home villages.

### **The Settlement of Egyptian Peasants in the Nubian Region in Sudan**

In late 2003, news leaked out revealing that negotiations at the highest levels with the Egyptian government had been conducted to facilitate the settlement of millions of Egyptian peasants, along with their families, in the triangle of the Nubian basin; Halfa-Dongola-Uweinat. The aim of this move is said to be, on the one hand, to safeguard the Arab identity of Sudan against the growing awareness of Africanism in Sudan, generally and among the Nubians in particular. On the other hand, it is said to serve a very cynical purpose: to help re-populate the Nubian region from which its people have continued moving away for the last half century.

The Sudanese delegation, which was backed by a presidential mandate, was led by an Arabist Nubian, General-Brigadier Abdul Rahim Muhammad Husain (then Minister of the Interior, presently Minister of Defence). A cover-up plan named the "Four Freedoms" which theoretically allows the Sudanese, and the Egyptians as well, to own agrarian lands and settle in both countries, was officially declared. The cover-up plan came out half cooked, as both parties were over eager in their scramble to create a *de facto* situation, before the Nubians become aware of what was going on. There is no agrarian land to be owned by the Sudanese investors in Egypt. But there is land for the Egyptians in the Sudan.

On 31 March 2003 a headline news press release from the state Minister of Agriculture in Khartoum (Dr al-Sadig Amara, an Arabist Nubian as well) revealed that 6.1 million feddans in the triangle of Nubian basin had been sold to the Egyptians (investors and peasants) with long term leases, i.e. investment through settlement (cf. *al-Sahafa Newspaper*, 31 March 2004, No. 3892). There is no mention of the Nubians in all these deals, which seem like they were made overnight.

### ***Online Evidences***

On official visits to Cairo, the two ministers mentioned above held meetings with Egyptian scholars and intellectuals who were sceptical about the viability of resettling millions of Egyptian peasants in the Sudan (for Dr Sadig Amara, see: <http://www.ahram.org.eg/archive/index.asp?CurFN=file1.htm&DID=8373>). Such a scheme, applied in Iraq a few years ago during the war against Iran, resulted in the physical elimination of the poor peasants immediately after the war ended. However the two flamboyant ministers chivalrously gave their solemn pledges, reminding their audience that they were backed by a presidential mandate.

The Minister of Defence went out of his way in challenging his audience to bring forward alternative solutions for tackling the population explosion in Egypt, if not through migration to the vast areas of the sparsely populated northern Sudan. Furthermore, lamenting the fact that the Egyptian migration to the Sudan had significantly diminished in the late decades after independence, he pointed out that the migration from West Africa had steadily increased. The state minister on his behalf lamented the hesitation of some Egyptian intellectuals and officials, urging them to expedite moving to the Nubian basin before [*sic*] other people moved there (see: <http://www.ahram.org.eg/archive/Index.asp?CurFN=file5.htm&DID=8359>; see also: <http://acpss.ahram.org.eg/ahram/2001/1/1/CONF20.HTM>).

### ***Pro Egypt, Anti Sudan***

The advocacy for this second objective was left to a collection of pro-Cairo writers. In a symposium held in Khartoum and sponsored by the Ahram Strategic Centre (understandably the symposium was presided by an Egyptian journalist) and the Centre for Media Services (CMS, a media arm affiliated to the Sudan security organ), a Sudanese ambassador (Izz al-Din Hamid, cf. *al-Rai al-Am Newspaper*, 18 April 2004, p. 3) said: “The present integration has not gone beyond the bilateral relations. To have it [the true integration] the top priority should go to food security, agricultural integration and the expansion in wheat cultivation in the northern region of the Sudan so as to encourage the Egyptian peasant to cross the border into the northern region in order to achieve the structural demographic equilibrium, which lacks attractiveness with regard to the Arab countries, especially Egypt, while it is attractive to people of West Africa who knew their way to the Sudan since long ago.”

In a newspaper article, Muhammad Sa'id Muhammad al-Hasan, who is fanatically pro-Egyptian, went further to claim that the Egyptian demographic re-population of the Nubian region is not only a necessity, but also a right (cf. *al-Rai al-am Newspaper*, 8 February 2005, No. 2351). In one of his Egypt-loving articles, which was published in a Sudanese newspaper, we read “... the population inter-mix between the two parts of the Nile valley should take the first priority as it is necessary for the South [i.e. the Sudan] in the same way as it is a necessary for the North [i.e. Egypt]; it is the core of the

integrative and unification process ... The acceleration of the 'Four Freedoms Agreement', especially the part that deals with facilitating the move of Egyptian peasants towards the southern part [of the valley, i.e. the northern part of the Sudan], will bring about a wide range of benefits in the Nile valley, not only on the level of agricultural produce and expansion and the creation of new productive areas, but also on the level of realizing demographic equilibrium. ... Thus we come to the role of Egypt in securing Sudan and bringing peace to it, and the reinstatement of the Joint Defence Treaty [signed with the May Regime (1969-1985) and nullified by the democratic rule (1985-1989)] ... As strategic necessity, it [Egypt] should restore its influence [in Sudan] and the Nile agreement along with the restoration of life and population density in the area of Old Halfa. During its rule of the Sudan, the British administration intentionally sent back home the Egyptians who worked in the Sudan, completely prohibiting their entry without a visa that was only granted to government officials. At the same time it opened the door for primitive immigration [*si*] coming from neighbouring African countries... .”

A flow of pro-Egyptian, anti-Sudan newspaper articles began appearing regularly. They were all characteristic with particular discursive clauses, such as “the strategic demographic equilibrium”, the Egyptians are assumed to realize in de-populated northern Sudan “the dire necessity for Egyptian public presence in northern Sudan”, and cynical allusions such as the “free and un-inhibited move of West Africans into the Sudan.”

All these developments lead the Nubians to submit a memo to Kofi Annan (cf. Hashim, 2006) where they raised the alarm and asked to be protected. In that memo, they argued that the Egyptian government, right from the beginning, wanted the area of the High Dam reservoir completely depopulated of its indigenous people (i.e. all the Nubians affected in both the Sudan and Egypt). They further argued that disrupting the Nubian society of northern Sudan and southern Egypt was a target for the governments of both countries, as the Nubians constituted the only indigenous ethnic group with an African tongue on the Nile from Kosti and Sinnar (up the White Nile) down to the Mediterranean Sea.

### ***Is it Flat Submissiveness of Sudan to Egypt?***

In fact the plans to evacuate the Nubian region, so as to facilitate the re-settlement of millions of Egyptian peasants to resolve Egypt's chronic problems of population increase on the one side, and the scarcity of resources on the other, seem to be endorsed by political forces other than the present Islamic regime. In 2000 al-Sadig al-Mahdi, the elected prime minister in the last democracy (1985-1989) and the Imam of the Ansar sect and leader of Umma Party, published a book while in exile in Cairo with the title: *Miyāh al-nīl: al-wa'd w'al-wa'id* (The Nile Water: the Expectations and the Menaces) where we read under the heading “The Demographic Map”: “The present demographic map of the Sudan has a defect; the provision of services and the demands of development

necessitates a population improvement by which the dispersed villages, whose number is about 65, are regrouped into bigger villages. The investment map of the Sudan also needs to be fundamentally reconsidered. The demographic map in Egypt suffers also from defects because almost the whole population of Egypt are settled on the Nile bank and its delta, which is about 3 per cent of its land. There have been repeated attempts, since the time of the *Tabrîr* Province, and presently *al-Wādî al-jadîd* (the New Valley) and Toshka, to break away from the known human settlements so as to achieve demographic dispersion – a matter completely contrary to the Sudanese case. The new demographic map [sic] will show the need for demographic injections in various areas in the Sudan. The thought of organizing Egyptian migration to the Sudan is far more feasible than trying to develop lands reclaimed from the desert which cost much water and money.” In a symposium held in Khartoum in 2007, al-Sadig al-Mahdi concurred with his suggestions that it would be wise for the Egyptians to move to Sudan (cf. *Al-Wasit Newspaper*, 29 November 2007). This shows that the threats facing the Nubians may not come to an end with the dismantlement of the present Islamic regime.

The government officials kept denying their intentions of resettling millions of Egyptian peasant in the Sudan, while working for it openly. This was thought by many Nubians to be a way of de-sensitizing the issue. The *al-Masri alyoum Newspaper* [The Egyptian Today] of 3 April 2008 wrote: “Jalal al-Dugeir [Secretary General of Democratic Unionist Party], the Sudanese minister of industry, has revealed that his country had received offers from Egypt, Qatar and the Emirates to cultivate about 6 million feddans of wheat”. When asked about the expected mass migration of Egyptians to the Sudan, the minister resignedly said: “The Egyptians are coming in all cases, whether we like it or not.” This statement is also available online: <http://www.almasry-alyoum.com/articl...rticleID=99842>. The number given by the said newspaper for the Egyptians was only 5,000. However, on 26 May 2008 the *al-Sahafa Newspaper* [Sudan] appeared with the following headline news: “Arrangements for the Resettlement of 5 Million Egyptians Peasants in al-Gezira Region [just south of Khartoum].” The Nubians also took the naming of al-Gezira as a de-sensitization tactic, expecting it to eventually be their own region, as it is their region that has all the lands greedily sought by the Egyptian government.

In the early years of the Islamic government in the Sudan (1989-1995), the relationship with Egypt was very hostile. In 1995, Egypt accused Sudan of plotting to assassinate its president, Hosni Mubarak, in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. By the turn of the century, in seeking regional allies, the Islamic government of Khartoum befriended Egypt, but apparently at a very high cost. Since then, Egypt and other Arabs states have begun scrambling into the Sudan to do business, with a host of secretive development projects being hatched.

Sudan has never been this submissive to either Egypt or the Arabs. This has encouraged the Egyptians not to show any bashfulness or diplomacy when dealing with

internal and sensitive Sudanese issues. In a workshop held by the Middle East & African Studies Centre under the title "Towards a National Strategy of Water in the Sudan" at I-Zubeir Muhammad Salih Hall, Khartoum, 2 September 2007, the Egyptian Ambassador went out of his way to attack the Sudanese who stood against building the dams in northern Sudan (cf. Fikri Abul Qasim, "Nadwat al-miyah wa 'uzlat al-safir" [The Symposium on Water and the Isolation of the Ambassador], *Eilaf Newspaper*, 10 September 2007). In a press conference held in Cairo the Egyptian Minister of Investment (Mahmoud Mohyildin) commented on the Egyptian and Arab scramble into the Sudan for investment by saying: "Investment in the Sudan is for the swift who first catches it up" (*Al-Sahafa Newspaper*, 16 April 2008).

This is the same Egypt which has been occupying the Sudanese territory of Halayib on the Red Sea since 1990. It is worth mentioning that in the national census held in 2008, the Sudanese government failed to cover the triangle of Halyib; the Egyptian government did not allow it to go there. The *Al-Sudani Newspaper*, 10 March 2008, appeared with the following headline: "The Egyptian Authorities Impede undertaking the Census in Halayib."

### **The High Dam and the De-Population of the Nubian Region in Sudan and Egypt**

The construction of the High Dam in Aswan was completed, resulting in an area of 500 km along the Nile course (310 km in Egypt, 190 km in the Sudan) being submerged under the reservoir. The reservoir, i.e. the lake, bears two names, Lake Nasser in Egypt, and Lake Nubia in the Sudan. This has led to the resettlement of about 16,500 Nubian families in Egypt (with a similar number of Nubian families on the Sudan side) away from their historical lands. In the case of Egyptian Nubians, the area for resettlement was a barren place called Koum Ambo near Aswan. In the case of the Sudanese Nubians, the area of resettlement was a place called Khashm al-Girba in middle-eastern Sudan, known to be of a rainy autumn, in contrast to the Saharan Nubian region.

Thus the High Dam of Aswan has literally resulted in the submerged area being completely de-populated. Since then, the evacuated area has witnessed no development projects. Only in recent years has the Egyptian government started to re-populate the area, so as to develop it.

### ***The Non-Nubian Re-Population of Nubia***

The Nubians in both Egypt and the Sudan did make many attempts to go back and establish small colonies of settlements and agriculture. They farmed the drawdown areas by pumping water from the reservoir (Fernea & Rouchdy, 1991). However, all these attempts were occasionally aborted by the fluctuating water level of the reservoir, a matter the Nubians believe to be intentional by the authorities that never encouraged them to go back.

By the 1990s the Egyptian government began following a policy of repopulating the evacuated Nubian regions. It began encouraging Egyptians, other than Nubians to settle in the evacuated areas around the reservoir lake. It did this while the Nubians were kept away from their own historical lands, living a pigsty life in their barren area of Koum Ambo. However, two economical activities have been available for development in the evacuated area; namely fishery and agriculture. Indeed there are such projects, but with no Nubians among either the fishers by the Egyptian government (for fishery, cf. Lassaily-Jacob, 1990; for agriculture, cf. Fernea & Rouchdy, 1991). The same thing happened in the Sudan, with tacit encouragement from the government to the Arab Bedouin who began settling in the evacuated area. The full and open selling-out of Sudanese Nubia by the Sudanese government was still to wait for a few years to come.

The re-population of the Nubian region in Egypt has become an official policy entrusted to both the Minister of Agriculture and the military governor of Aswan. Villages with full facilities and utilities were built by the Egyptian government and distributed to individuals and families from outside the regions with bank loans to start them off. The latest of this is the inauguration of the settlement at the old Nubian village of Kalabsha, with 150 non-Nubian families, which was opened by the Minister of Agriculture, Amin Abaza (cf. *al-Wafd Newspaper*, 18/05/2006). On 11 July 2006 the *Al-Abram Newspaper* (the unofficial voice of the government) announced that tens of thousands of feddans were to be distributed in the Nubian region to people other than the Nubians themselves. When the Nubians demanded that their lands be returned to them, they got an arrogant reply from the military governor of Aswan: "If you want your lands, go fetch them beneath the water" (cf. Rajab al-Murshidi in *Rousa al Yousef Newspaper*. [www.rosaonline.net](http://www.rosaonline.net)).

At the same time, the Nubians who ventured on by building their own colonies and farms in their old lands began facing obstacles at every corner. No-one from the international community has come to help the Nubians in Egypt. They began voicing their problem through the Internet, making use of the numerous Nubian websites, which mostly revolve around the home-villages bearing their names (cf. [www.abirtabag.net](http://www.abirtabag.net); [www.jazeratsai.com](http://www.jazeratsai.com); [www.karma2.com](http://www.karma2.com); [www.3amara.com](http://www.3amara.com); [www.nubian-forum.com/vb](http://www.nubian-forum.com/vb) and [www.nubnubian.com](http://www.nubnubian.com)).

This policy was adopted by the Egyptian government in order to contain the discontent among its Arab population who had been negatively affected by the 1992 Agricultural Law, which came into effect by 1997. This law liberalized the land tenure market by abolishing the old land rental and tenure by returning it to its old feudal owners, thus compelling the peasants to re-hire it all over again, with the threat of a rental price increase looming over their heads. During the 1990s, the price actually tripled and by now it has quadrupled (Roudart, 2000/1). This has caused turmoil and unrest among the peasants who began seeking other jobs. Migration of the peasants to other areas of agricultural schemes of reclaimed land, away from their home villages,

was encouraged by the government. The Egyptian government adopted the policy of inter-migration so as to solve; (1) its chronic problem of population explosion, and; (2) to compensate those who have been negatively affected by its land liberalization law. Re-settlement in the reclaimed land of the New Valley in Sinai was officially encouraged, a matter the peasants were not enthusiastic about. Being riverain all through history, such a move was too much for them. That is how the Egyptian government began re-settling them in the Nubian regions which were evacuated four decades ago against the will of its historical people, the Nubians.

### **The Argument against the Dams in Northern Sudan**

The presidential-mandated Dams Implementation Unit (DIU) declared plans to construct more than 20 dams with five of them in northern Sudan; Dagash and al-Shireik dams at the fifth cataract (affecting the Rubatab tribe); Mirwi dam at the fourth cataract (affecting all of the Manasir tribe and part of the Shayqiyya tribe); Kajbar dam at the third cataract (affecting the southern part of the Mahas Nubians and the northern part of the Dongola Nubians); and Dal dam at the second cataract (affecting all Sukkout Nubians and the no Mahas Nubians).

Dams are built either with productive (agriculture and power) or preventive (against floods and draught) objectives. Their functions, however, are not mutually exclusive, as a dam can serve one, two, or even all of the above purposes (as is the case with the Aswan High Dam). However, it is deemed necessary to clearly state the function of a dam when building one. If a dam is built to irrigate land, then the agricultural scheme should necessarily be conceived before the idea of the dam; the same rule applies when the dam is built to generate power for industry. So far, aside from generalizing and saying that these dams are meant for both agriculture and industry, the Sudan government has failed to publicly bring forward the details of any development project in relation to the dams it intends to build.

Below, I am going to discuss the feasibility of building dams with regard to irrigation, industry and duration.

### ***The Argument about Power Generation Claims***

The total amount of power to be generated from all the dams in the Sudan will not exceed 5,000 MW (according to Makkawi al-Awad, the Director-General of the National Electricity Corporation, cf. *Al-Ayyam Newspaper*, 16 February 2008). The cost of Mirwi dam has so far exceeded \$2.25 billion, borrowed from China and various Arab states and banks; the dam has not yet come to completion. With such a small amount of power to be generated, the dam is thought not feasible with regard to the high cost. For instance, the non-industrial consumption of power in the Saudi capital, Riyadh, is 8 000 MW. This raises a host of questions such as: If Saudi Arabia, as an oil country, is able to generate all this power (35,000 MW in total), why not Sudan, which has also become an



oil country? What will Sudan do when Khartoum becomes the size of Riyad? Makkawi al-Awad (ibid.) gives us the following options for power generation covering the period up to the year 2030, both thermal and hydro:

- Hydro-power generation: 4 587 MW (28%)
- Thermal-power generation: 18 491 MW (28%)

#### 4.2. The Argument about Irrigation Claims

Dams are often built to provide irrigation for agricultural development projects. However, this presupposes that there is enough water for this irrigation. The total share of Sudan in the Nile water is 18 billion cubic meters (BCM), while its consumption is 14 BCM, with a surplus of 4 BCM only. This means that it can rely on these 4 million cubic meters for its agricultural development projects. But building the five dams in northern Sudan will waste more than its surplus in evaporation, as the region is known for its very hot climate. To make things worse, the region is also known for its relatively flat topography, a matter that results in the dam reservoirs being extensively stretched; thus providing a great water surface for evaporation. Of the five dams, I will consider the evaporation loss of only three of them: Mirwi, Kajbar and Dal. These figures are taken from Dr Seif al-Din Hamad Abdalla (2008), "*al-qudra al-takhsīniyya l'il-sudūd 'ala al-nīl wa rawāfidihi dākhl al-Sudan*" [The Storaion Capacity of the Dams on the Nile and its Tributaries in the Sudan], Workshop of the Middle East & African Studies Centre under the title "Towards a National Strategy of Water in the Sudan." Al-Zubeir Muhammad Salih Hall, Khartoum, 2 September 2007. The importance of this reference is that the writer, more than being a highly qualified person on water resources, is the expert for the Ministry of Irrigation and Water Resources and in this capacity, he submitted this paper:

- Mirwi Dam evaporation loss of water: 1.5 BCM
- Kajbar Dam evaporation loss of water: 1.7 BCM
- Dal Dam evaporation loss of water: 800 MCM

This shows that the building of these three dams will literally leave Sudan without any water surplus that may allow it to undertake further agricultural development projects. The same author, speaking in the same capacity in a symposium held by the government in Khartoum, stated that only 2 BCM of Sudan's surplus of water will remain after the completion of Mirwi dam (cf. *Al-Khartoum Newspaper*, 24 June 2008); the remaining 2 BCM will vanish into the thin air by the completion of the Kajbar and Dal dams. In a conference of Arab ministers of water resources held in the Sharm al-Shaikh resort in Egypt, the Sudanese minister, Kamal Ali, admitted that the dams of northern

Sudan were being built only for power generation (cf. *Al-Masri alyoum Newspaper* [The Egyptian Today], 22 March 2008).

But this raises the following question; If there is no water left, from where will the settling Egyptians irrigate the fields of millions of feddans they are allegedly going to cultivate in the Sudan? The millions of feddans are not located close to the Nile – the nearest will be at least 30 km west of the Nile. This is the Nubian basin of Halfa-Dongola-Uweinat, referred to above. About this basin the Arab Organization for Investment and Agricultural Development (AOIAD) writes: “The capacity of this basin is 5,500 million cubic meters with a total of 136 MCM feeding it (from the Atbara and Nile rivers). The feed-up increase when water starts to be pumped from it” (AOIAD, 1983, *Dirasa istita'iyya gi lil-mawarid wal'istithmar al-zira'i fil-iqlimayn al-sharqi wal'shimali fi jamburiyyat al-Sudan al-dimuqratiyya* [A Pilot Study about the Agricultural Resources and Investment in the East and North Regions in the Democratic Republic of the Sudan], Khartoum, 1983). Pumping the water from its ground reservoirs in the basin is not expensive, as the reservoirs, notwithstanding that they go deep into the ground, are close to the surface (AOIAD, *Tabdith dirasat al-tawassu' hg-'ufuqi wal-ea'si fi zira'at al-qamih bil-iqlim al-shimali fi-jamburiyyat al-Sudan* [The Updating of the Studies for the Horizontal and Vertical Cultivation of Wheat in the Northern Region of the Sudan], Khartoum, 1990). Whereas the Egyptians have exclusively bought over the lands on the western side of the river Nile in the northern region of Nubian land, various Arab states and investment companies have bought lands on the eastern side of the Nile. It is worth noting that there is no water, whether from the Nile (canalized from the dams) or from underground, on the eastern side of the Nile, as the river approximately lies on a rocky mastaba that extends up to the Red Sea Hills. From where the Arabs are going to get water to irrigate their cultivation remains to be answered by them.

### ***The Argument about Dam Duration***

Dams built on rivers with high alluvial sediments, such as is the case with the river Nile, are deemed unfeasible (Abdalla, 2007). The dam of Khashm al-Qirba on the river Atbara in eastern Sudan was built to irrigate the agricultural projects set up solely to sustain the Nubians affected by the Aswan High Dam who had been resettled there. It was built at the same time with the Aswan High Dam. The last 40 years have been enough to relegate it into redundancy as a result of the river's annual 170 million tons of sediment (ibid.). This has led to the deterioration of the Khashm al-Qirba agricultural scheme to the extent that it could not sustain the Nubians who have found themselves compelled to mount another exodus, this time to the marginalized outskirts of Khartoum.

The situation of the Aswan High Dam with regard to sedimentation remains a matter for guessing, due to the secrecy enveloping it. However, it is known that the USAID have funded \$154 million in improvements to the High Dam since the late

1980s:(<http://egypt.usaid.gov/Default.aspx?PageID=84>;[http://www.usaid.gov/stories/egypt/cs\\_egypt\\_dam.html](http://www.usaid.gov/stories/egypt/cs_egypt_dam.html)).

More than harming the turbines of the dam, the high alluvial sediments of the Nile water have caused acute problems of salinity in Egypt. In R.J. Oosterbaan (1999) (online <http://www.waterlog.info/> ) we read: "The salt concentration of the water in lake Nasser [read Lake Nubia in the Sudan] at the High Dam is about 0.25 kg<sup>3</sup> salt/m. The salt import into Egypt's water use systems thus amounts to about 14 million tons per year (55 billion m<sup>3</sup> water/year x 0.25 kg salt/m<sup>3</sup> water) or roughly 1.6 ton/feddan/year over 8.7 million feddan of irrigated land, i.e. 4.0 ton/ha/year." So, if the last 40 years were enough to turn the Khashm al-Qirba dam into redundancy, then it is quite possible that the dams being built in northern Sudan will face the same fate. When the river Atbara joins the Nile, the alluvial sediments reach 270 million tons. All five the dams are down the confluence of the Atbara and the Nile. This brings into question the feasibility of building these dams. Are they built to save the Aswan High Dam from the fate that has befallen Khashm al-Qirba dam? If this is so, then why should the Sudanese tax payers pay for building them? Such were the questions raised by the anti-dam Nubians.

In a newspaper interview, when faced with such anti-dam arguments, the Director of DIU, Osama Abdalla, defiantly retorted back: "The more they attack me, the more projects I will come up with" (cf. *Al-Wifaq Newspaper*, 30 April 2008).

### **The Government Shoot-to-Kill Policy against the Anti-Dam Villagers**

Building dams is a technical matter where transparency is most needed regarding technical qualifications. The unit responsible for building dams in the Sudan used to be under the authority of a technical ministry, that of Irrigation and Water Resources, until it was put under the direct authority of the Presidency in 1999 with a law of its own that makes it immune from litigation and auditing. Since then the building of dams has been politicized to the extent that a number of specialists and experts feared that this might have compromised the professionalism and technicality of dam building.

As the policy of total de-population was adopted in all these projects, it was decided that the people affected by Mirwi dam be resettled in areas far from their historical homelands, at gun point. To make it even worse, the government was very secretive about the project, totally ignoring the need to consult the concerned communities. Those who lived immediately behind the dam, i.e. the Hamdab, were compelled to resettle in an arid area covered by sand dunes about 100 km down the river, far from its shore. They submitted to that because they were not fully aware of the plight to befall them. The people next to them, i.e. those of the Amri region, resisted the plans of resettlement, demanding to be allowed to resettle on the shore of the artificial lake by the dam, just above the contour at which the rising water would stop. The government declined them this right. The Manasir who were the only ethnic group to be wholly affected by the dam, adamantly rejected evacuating the area, demanding, like their

brethren in the Amri area, the right to resettle on the shore of the lake. They were also denied this right. Up to this moment, one third of the Amri people and the majority of the Manasir are there sticking to their home villages notwithstanding the rising water of the dam, as on 16 April 2008 the last gate of the dam was closed. The tragedies of the people who have remained are all over the web. One only needs to google either "Amri" or "Manasir" to find the likes of: [http://uk.youtube.com/watch?v=B1it\\_0SSa4k&feature=related](http://uk.youtube.com/watch?v=B1it_0SSa4k&feature=related).

The Nubians have been traumatized by the dams that have been built on the Nile since 1902, when the first Aswan dam was constructed. Their trauma continued on all through the rising phases of it (1910, 1933) to the construction of the High Dam in 1964. All this has prompted the Nubians of Dongola, Mahas and Sukkout to organize themselves to resist the building of any more dams. The Nubians of the Halfa region who were affected by the High Dam and have long since been resettled in the eastern Sudan, joined their brethren in the fight against dam building. The President announced that dams were not going to be built without the explicit consent of the people in the affected area. The exact maps showing the boundary of the areas to be affected by the dams of Mirwi, Kajbar and Dal were kept secret. However, rumours leaked from the DIU telling that the water reservoir of Kajbar dam would extend 105 km up the river to Dongola city; the water reservoir of Dal dam would extend to 65 km up the river to a small village called Kid Urma, just 6 km down the dam of Kajbar. To curb these widespread rumours, the DIU began speaking about the areas to be affected, every time increasing the size of the reservoir and submerged areas.

### ***The shooting of Amri People***

On the 22<sup>nd</sup> of April 2006 on Amri island, government security forces, militia groups and special paratroops belonging to the DIU opened fire on a small congregation of people who resisted being evicted. Three people were killed immediately, with others injured. The Sudan Human Rights Organization reported the murderous attack with strong condemnation: "As relayed by several witnesses, as well as families of the injured citizens, the attack was planned and executed by the assaulting troop in collaboration with the security headquarters of the dam administration, which had been threatening with 'severe reactions' the natives opposing the dam's location and the resettlement plans for the natives far away from their ancestral land at the Nile bank" (for more details of the incident, see: [http://www.sudantribune.com/article.php3?id\\_article=15235](http://www.sudantribune.com/article.php3?id_article=15235)).

Unlike the Nubians, the people affected by Mirwi dam did agree to the project, but not without the condition to remain living in their home areas, i.e. not to be evacuated. However, the government seemed to have other agendas. By then, the regions of northern Sudan were reeking with wild rumours and conspiracy theories telling of secret agreements between the Sudanese and Egyptian governments, upon which Egyptians

peasants would be marauding the region. In fact they were far from being either rumours or conspiracy theories, as they contained a grain of truth; the Four Freedoms has paved the way to bring about and realize these fears and rumours.

### ***The shooting of Kajbar People***

Kajbar is a small village in the middle of the Nubian Mahas region about 111 km down the river from Dongola, the capital of the northern state. The most northerly part of the third cataract ends at Kajbar, where the government declared, in 1995, its plans to build a dam. So it was natural for their reaction to the project to be negative and to reject the idea with the intention of resisting it.

Such were the contentions the Nubians had had when they began organizing village-scale demonstrations, especially in Kajbar area. Believing in the presidential and official promises, they wanted to express their total rejection of the dam building. On the 10<sup>th</sup> of April 2007 they organized a peaceful demonstration in the small villages overlooking the cataract, which was assumed to be the site of the dam. The special security force, which was putting on an army fatigue, opened fire wounding at least five people. Taking the injured people and heading back to the nearest hospital, at a certain river-mountain strait (called *Kidin Takkār* in Nubian) that allows for only one vehicle to pass at a time, the demonstrators came across a group of about 20 heavily armed soldiers apparently meant as reinforcement. Outnumbering the armed men, the angry demonstrators encircled the two vehicles and took the soldiers hostage, after stripping them of their arms, for about two hours, before releasing them.

On the 13<sup>th</sup> of June 2007 the villagers organized another peaceful demonstration that started from a village called Farrēg and then headed down the river toward the cataract. About 5 km up the river from the cataract, exactly at the same strait where they had held the armed men hostage, the demonstration was ambushed by a heavily armed force that had been positioned atop the mountain. The force opened fire killing instantly four people, with one of them (Muhammad Faqir) a teenager of only 18 years old. More than 15 people were injured. The whole massacre was filmed by a video amateur; it shows the armed men cheering and dancing when shooting the villagers (see: <http://www.youtube.com/user/nabielogr>). In the coming weeks more than 20 people were arrested, among them journalists who tried to report on the matter (see: <http://www.copts.com/english1/index.php/2007/08/07/amnesty-calls-for-release-of-sudan-detainees/>). Leading figures of Nubian senior activists resisting the dam-building were also detained for months (see: <http://platform.blogs.com/passionofthepresent/2007/07/new-arrest-foll.html>). Young Nubian activists were also arrested in northern Sudan and Khartoum (see: [http://www.amnesty.org/en/alfresco\\_asset/55c51b81-a2ba-11dc-8d74-6f45f39984e5/afr540532007en.html](http://www.amnesty.org/en/alfresco_asset/55c51b81-a2ba-11dc-8d74-6f45f39984e5/afr540532007en.html)).

## Conclusion

The situation in Nubia and northern Sudan is very critical. There is evidence that both the governments of Khartoum and Cairo are working to facilitate the settlement of millions of Egyptian peasants in the northern region. This policy of demographic engineering is believed by many to be the major factor that has led to the devastation of Darfur, with hundreds of thousands killed in a way that have made the international community look at it as a case of genocide. The Nubians already raised the alarm a few years ago in their memo to the then UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan. The question they raise now is whether the international community is waiting for them to be killed in tens and hundreds of thousands before paying attention. They believe that to stop a war before it begins is far easier than to stop it after it has started. They believe that to wait for a war to be launched and then intervene is a stance loaded with hidden agendas, whereas to come in support of the people afflicted before it is war, shows true human solidarity and spares the afflicted country the trauma of neo-colonial intervention that capitalizes on the calamities of the developing countries.

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